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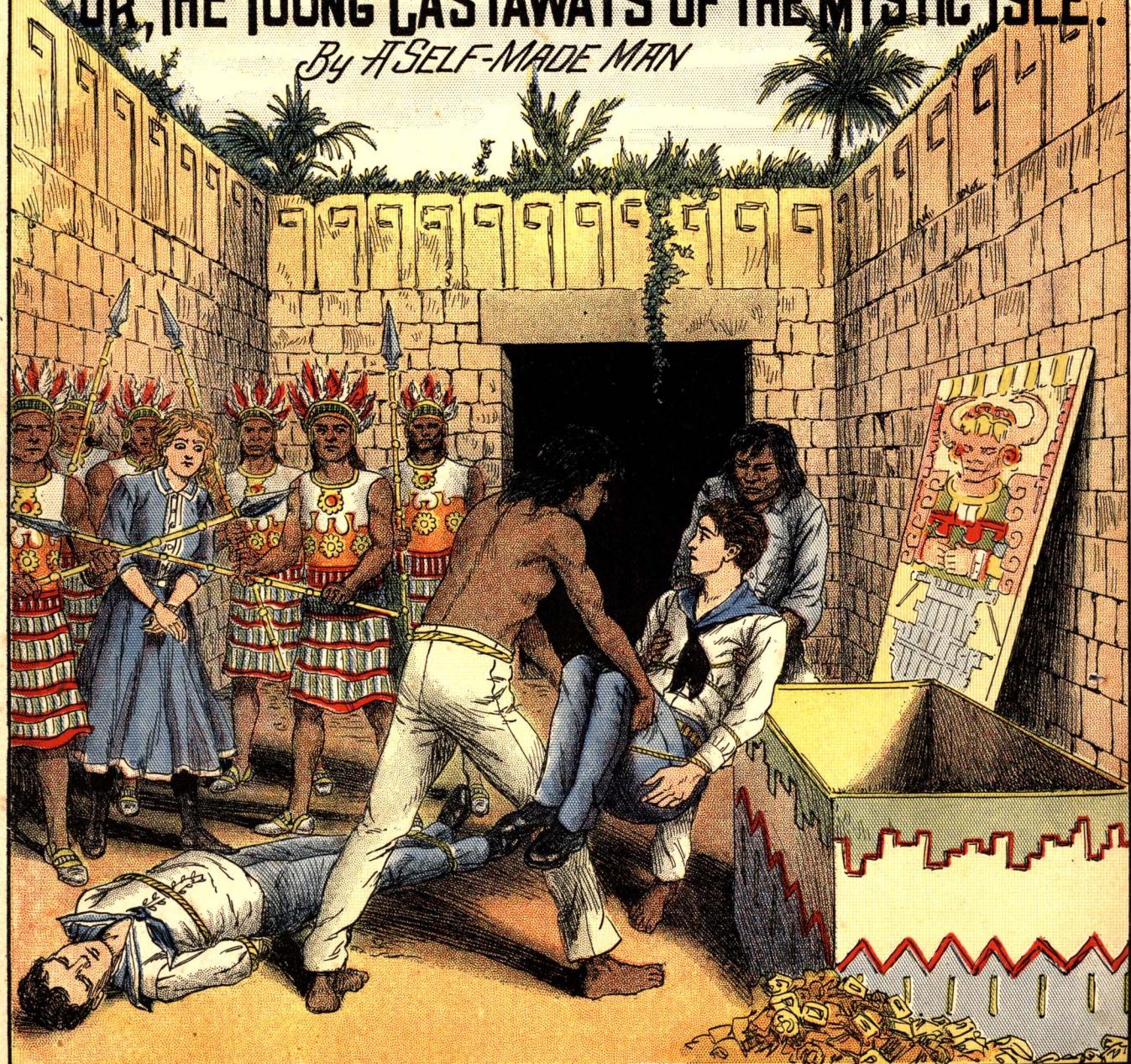
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FORTUNE WEEKLY

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

**IN THE LAND OF GOLD,
OR, THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS OF THE MYSTIC ISLE.**

By A SELF-MADE MAN



As the two natives lifted Jack into the stone sarcophagus that was to be his grave, Kittie Raymond uttered a scream and attempted to rush over to him, but was prevented by the crossed spears of the Aztec-looking warriors.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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IN THE LAND OF GOLD

OR,

THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS OF THE MYSTIC ISLE

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

THE UNEXPECTED LETTER.

"There's a letter for you in to-night's mail, Jack," said Benny Day, the porter of the Poundexter Academy for Boys, which was situated on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, on the outskirts of Seabrook, a small hamlet on the N. O. & N. E. Railroad, about five miles from the city of New Orleans.

"A letter for me!" exclaimed Jack Carter in surprise, for that was a luxury that only came his way once a month, when he received a short and cold communication from his only relative, his uncle, Leonard Carter, of Mobile, inquiring as to the state of his health and his progress in his studies, invariably concluding with the stereotyped sentence, "Your aunt sends her love, and hopes you are a good boy."

He had received a letter from his uncle a week previous, and did not look for another for three weeks more.

"Yes," replied Benny, in answer to his exclamation. "City postmark."

"City postmark!" ejaculated Jack, evidently more astonished. "Why, I don't know any one in New Orleans. Sure it's for me?"

"Positive. I was standing by the doctor's desk while he was sorting the mail over. When he came to your letter he stopped and looked at it mighty hard, as if it was some kind of curiosity."

"I don't wonder," chuckled Jack.

"Then I saw that it was addressed to you, 'Jack Carter,'

Esquire, Poundexter Academy, Seabrook, La.,' in big, round letters. The doc. held the letter so long in his fingers that I noticed the postmark, 'New Orleans, 2 P. M., May 12.'"

"That's to-day."

"Sure as you live."

"I suppose I'll get it at tea time, and then I'll know who it's from."

"Maybe you won't get it at all," said Benny, with an expressive wink.

"Why, won't I, if it's addressed to me?"

"Because, Old Pickles don't give out every letter that comes here to the boys. I thought you knew that."

"I've heard something to that effect, but it's against the law, isn't it, to hold back a person's letters?"

"What's the law got to do with it? The doc. goes by the regulations of the school, which he made himself, and these give him the right to read any letter that he thinks ain't from a fellow's parents or guardian."

"I call that an outrage. If a chap has a chum, or a girl, or somebody else who writes to him the doctor assumes the right to read his private correspondence, eh?"

"That's what he does. I know he thought your letter looked suspicious because he laid it aside with a couple of others which he intends to read at his leisure."

"Where did he put my letter?"

"Your letter and three others he put in the top, right-hand drawer of his desk, and there they'll stay till he gets ready to read them. If he ain't satisfied with what's in your letter, he'll burn it or tear it up. As I had my doubts about you ever seeing it, I thought I'd tell you about it so

you'd know a letter had come for you which Old Pickles wouldn't let you see," said Benny.

Thus speaking, Benny walked away toward the kitchen.

"I think Dr. Poundexter has a big nerve to hold back and read any letter he chooses that comes through the mail to us, and a bigger nerve to destroy afterward, any letter that doesn't suit his fancy," muttered Jack Carter, digging his heel discontentedly into the gravel. "I don't know who has written to me from New Orleans, but I'd like to know the worst way, and I sha'n't be satisfied till I find out."

Jack finally walked away, but his fertile mind was busy with several plans looking to the recovery of his letter if the doctor held it out.

At length, the tea bell rang, the fifty-odd boys formed in line along the porch outside of the refectory, and when the word was given by one of the tutors, they marched inside and took their places at the tables.

The meal proceeded as usual, under the eye of the tutor in charge, who sat at one end of the room on a raised platform.

Before tea was quite over, Benny, as usual, marched in with the mail that was to be distributed to the scholars.

He laid it on the tutor's table and retired.

When the half hour allotted to the meal was up, the tutor touched a bell, then he called out the names of those for whom he had letters and other mail-matter, and each boy went up to the desk in turn, and received what was coming to him.

On this particular evening, about ten boys were called up.

The expectant Jack was not called, so he understood that his letter was held back by Dr. Poundexter.

He bit his lip angrily, for he deeply resented the doctor's line of action.

As the bell tapped for the boys to stand up, before leaving the tables, Benny re-entered the refectory, and walking up to the tutor, said something to him.

"Jack Carter," said the tutor.

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, promptly.

"Step this way, please."

Jack walked to the desk, and stood waiting the tutor's pleasure.

That gentleman tapped the bell twice, which was the signal for the boys to file out into the playground and disperse for an hour's play, before the bell rang for them to go to the study hall for night study.

While the boys were passing out of the refectory, the tutor turned to Jack and said:

"Dr. Poundexter wishes to see you in his study, right away."

Jack bowed and left the refectory by a side door, that led into a hall connecting with the part of the house in which the doctor and his wife lived.

Half way down the hall was the door of Dr. Poundexter's study.

The word "Office" was painted in small letters on the ground-glass pane which formed the upper half of the door.

Jack knocked, and was bidden to enter.

The doctor was seated at his desk, writing.

"You sent for me, Dr. Poundexter," said Jack, in a respectful tone.

"I did. I want to ask you a question. Have you an acquaintance in the city?"

"No, sir."

The doctor pursed his lips and looked sharply at the boy.

"You are quite sure of that, are you?"

"Yes, sir. I don't know a soul in New Orleans, that is, unless some friend of mine from Mobile has come there unknown to me."

"Hem! Well, I perceived among the evening's mail, a letter addressed to you bearing the city postmark. The rules of my establishment, as you are aware, permit me to hold back and examine any letter addressed to a pupil that does not appear to have come from his parents or guardian. As I regarded this letter addressed to you from the city with suspicion, I opened and read it. In my opinion, its contents are hardly calculated to do you any good. I have therefore, decided not to give it to you, but mail it to your uncle with my reasons for withholding it."

This was not a pleasant bit of news for Jack.

He believed that he was rightfully entitled to that letter.

Whether he was or not, there seemed to be little chance of his ever getting it.

If he couldn't get the letter, the doctor might at least tell him who his unknown correspondent was, so he asked him for that information.

Dr. Poundexter after considering a moment, declined to enlighten him on the subject.

"That is all, Carter," he added. "You may go."

As Jack turned away, his eyes rested on the doctor's waste-paper basket.

There, with its face turned up, lay an envelope addressed to Jack Carter, care of the Poundexter Academy.

One end was torn off, revealing a small part of the enclosure.

The handwriting looked familiar to the boy, but he couldn't place it, at the moment.

This was clearly the letter the doctor had held back, and which he said he intended to mail to Jack's uncle.

From its presence in the waste-paper basket, it looked to the boy as if the letter was going into the fire instead of to his uncle.

If he could have secured that letter without attracting the doctor's notice, he would have done so in a moment; but he couldn't, and reluctantly left the room.

On his way back to the playground, that letter lying in the waste-paper basket haunted Jack's mind.

Wasn't there any way that he could get that letter?

He rudgeled his brains for some plan that would solve the problem.

Suddenly, he thought of Benny.

It was his duty to empty that basket every morning.

Perhaps he could persuade the young porter to attend to the basket that evening.

Then it would be a simple matter for the lad to take possession of the letter and hand it to Jack before the study bell rang.

He decided to hunt Benny up, and propose the matter to him.

He found the lad in an outhouse, cutting up wood for kindling.

"Benny, I want you to do me a great favor, and I'll make it all right with you at the first chance," said Jack.

"What's the favor?" asked the young porter.

"The letter you told me came for me in to-night's mail, is now lying in the doctor's waste-paper basket in his study. I want you to get it for me."

"How do you know it's in the basket?" asked Benny, much surprised.

"Because, I saw it there."

"Did Old Pickles send for you, to speak about that letter?"

"Yes."

"He told you that you couldn't have it, I suppose?"

"That's right. He told me that he intended to mail it to my uncle, but as I saw it lying in the basket, I feel sure that he really intends to have it burned up in the kitchen fire. You always empty the basket in the morning. What's the matter with you emptying it to-night, instead? Then you can get that letter and bring it to me, and I shall be under everlasting obligations to you."

"I needn't empty it, to get you the letter. The doctor is probably at supper by this time. I'll slip into the study, pick the letter out of the basket, and bring it to you. Just wait here, till I get back."

Benny dropped the hatchet, and was off like a shot.

In less than five minutes he was back, with a triumphant grin on his freckled face.

"There's your letter," he said, holding it out.

"By George! You're a brick," cried Jack, as he took it.

At that moment the bell rang, calling the students to the study hall.

As Jack had only time to reach his place in the line, he put the letter in his pocket and left the outhouse on the run.

CHAPTER II.

PAYING THE PIPER.

At nine o'clock, evening study came to an end, and the students were dismissed, to go to their sleeping rooms.

Jack occupied a room with three other boys.

It adjoined a much smaller one allotted to a single youth named Walter Pendleton, who had the reputation of being the sneak of the school.

At any rate, he was the most unpopular scholar at the academy.

The boys were allowed fifteen minutes in which to undress and get into bed, at the end of which time all lights had to be out in the sleeping rooms.

This was one of the most stringent rules of the academy and was always obeyed, but sometimes, after the inspecting tutor had gone his rounds, candles were lighted in more than one room for reasons known only to the boys themselves.

On this particular night, after the tutor had made his rounds, Jack sprang out of his bed and lit a small bit of candle.

"What's up?" asked one of the other three.

"I'm up, for one thing," chuckled Jack.

"Any fool can see that," growled the other. "What did you light the candle for?"

"I've got a letter I want to read. You chaps can turn

over and go to sleep. There is nothing doing that will interest you."

"When did you get the letter?" asked the other boy. "You wasn't called up to-night when the mail was distributed."

"Oh, this came by special delivery, later on," laughed Jack, tearing off the end of the envelope and pulling out the enclosure.

The letter was a short one, and the first thing Jack did was to glance at the signature to learn who his correspondent was.

He almost gave a whoop of delight when he saw the name of Tom Lanston signed to it in bold characters.

Tom was an old, Mobile chum of his, who had gone to sea a year since, and who he had almost forgotten in the whirl of succeeding events.

Tom had promised to write to him as often as he could, but if he had done so his uncle had never forwarded the letters to the academy, therefore, Jack was ignorant of his whereabouts, and what had happened to him, since they parted.

This was the first letter he had ever got from him, and it ran as follows:

"PALMETTO House, 60 D— St.,
NEW ORLEANS, May 12.

"DEAR OLD CHUM: What in thunder is the matter with you, old chap? I've written six letters to you, and never a one have you sent me in reply, though I told you when and where you could address me with the certainty of me getting your letter. I've just heard from Bob Baker, that you are at the Poundexter Academy, Seabrook, near this city, so maybe you never got my letters, which were all addressed to your home in Mobile, though I should imagine that your uncle would have sent them on to you. The brig has been here over two weeks, and we are now taking on board an assorted cargo for Vera Cruz, for which port we expect to sail in a few days. Now that I've located you so close to the city, I want you to try and get permission to come in and see me, if only for an hour or two, and I'll spin you some yarns that will make your hair curl. You'll find me at the Palmetto on Duguerre Street, No. 60, where I'm stopping while the brig's in port. A change from the fok's'l and the ship's grub, is a luxury to be appreciated by yours truly, though the Palmetto isn't a swell joint by any means—just a saloon and sailors' boarding-house. Come any afternoon this week. I'll be on the lookout for you, and I'll give you a royal welcome."

"Yours as ever,

"TOM LANSTON."

"Dear old Tom, just as breezy as ever," breathed Jack, after reading the letter over twice. "I must try and manage to see him somehow, though how I'm going to do it is a poser, for I'm sure Poundexter will never let me go to the city. I've a great mind to slip away to-morrow after dinner, spend the afternoon with Tom, and then come back and take my medicine."

As Jack gazed reflectively at the envelope to which he had returned the letter, the door suddenly opened, and Dr. Poundexter suddenly strode into the room.

"What does this mean, Jack Carter?" he said, sternly. "Why are you out of bed at this hour, with a lighted candle

which is strictly against the rules? What are you reading? A letter! Let me see it, sir."

Jack was so astonished and taken aback by the doctor's unexpected appearance, which was decidedly unusual, that Dr. Poundexter snatched Tom Lanston's letter out of his hand before he could make a move to hide it.

Had Jack been able to pierce the gloom of the corridor outside, he would have seen Walter Pendleton standing there fully dressed, and that would have accounted for the doctor's presence on the scene.

Pendleton, whose spying propensities were suspected by his companions, had peeked through the keyhole of the door, and seeing Jack reading a letter beside a lighted candle, had at once considered it his duty to notify Dr. Poundexter.

At any rate, Jack was caught redhanded, as it were, and he realized that he was up against it hard.

Dr. Poundexter glanced at the envelope, thinking it might be some communication which the boy had received in a surreptitious manner, either over the wall, or through the connivance of one of the servants.

The moment his eyes rested on the superscription, with its stamp and city postmark, he recognized it as the letter he had held back from Jack, and which he had thrown into his waste basket to be burned up.

His brow grew as black as a thunder-gust.

"How did you get this letter, Carter?" he demanded, sternly.

"It came out of your waste basket, sir," replied Jack, who scorned to either prevaricate or tell a direct lie.

"Then you saw it in the basket when you were in my study, this evening?"

"I did."

"And you took it out?"

"No, sir."

"How then, did you get possession of it?"

"I must decline to answer that question," replied Jack, firmly.

"I insist that you answer it, sir," said the doctor, harshly.

"I am sorry, sir, but I cannot."

The other three boys in the room were awake by this time, and they listened to what was going on with no little surprise.

They sympathized with Jack, but that was all they could do under the circumstances.

"Dress yourself at once and follow me," said the doctor.

Jack obeyed, satisfied that he was in for a severe punishment.

Dr. Poundexter led the way to his study.

"Now, sir," said the doctor, "I ask you once more to tell me how you got that letter."

"I can't tell you, Dr. Poundexter."

"Why not?"

"I have my reasons."

"What are your reasons?"

Jack remained silent.

"Answer me," cried the doctor, furiously.

"I do not feel as if I can explain them."

"You must, or I will punish you, severely."

"I can't help it, sir."

"Very well. You shall be confined in the black hole, to-night. You will have an opportunity to reflect in soli-

tude and discomfort. In the morning if you still persist in your refusal to explain how you got that letter, I shall cane you in the presence of the whole school. If that does not break down your obstinacy, you will be deprived of your noon playhour for the next thirty days. The four Saturdays of that time you will spend in the study hall by yourself, and that the time may not be wasted, you shall copy the history of Rome from the reign of Augustus Cæsar to the fall of the empire, as set forth in your modern history. Now, follow me."

The doctor led the way to a bare, windowless compartment in the basement of the school building.

The only piece of furniture it contained was a small, three-legged stool.

"Enter," said the doctor, sternly. "Your breakfast will be bread and water."

He locked the door on Jack and went away.

CHAPTER III.

BILL BROWN.

"So I'm to be made an example of, before the whole school to-morrow, because I refuse to tell how I got hold of that letter. Well, I don't mean to give Benny away, neither do I intend to submit to a caning if I can help myself. That is a little beyond the limit, at my age. I consider it a degradation. I'll run away, before I'll stand for it, no matter what the consequences may be, afterward."

That's the way Jack argued, as he walked up and down the narrow confines of the cell known as the "black hole," in which only very refractory boys had heretofore been confined.

It was situated at the corner of the school building.

The rest of the cellar was filled with wood and coal bins, miscellaneous truck, and the heating apparatus, which was seldom used.

The pitch darkness of the black hole was not pleasant to Jack, so he pulled out his matchsafe and struck a lucifer.

As he looked around the cheerless cell, he spied a small piece of candle that a former occupant had left there.

He lighted it, but the gleam hardly sufficed to more than make the darkness visible, as the saying is.

Although Jack had been at the school nearly a year, this was his first acquaintance with the black hole.

Examining it with some curiosity, he found that it was roughly constructed of plain boards, which formed the front and one side, the other two sides being the corner of the building.

The door, which hung on two big hinges, was also made of boards, held together by three braces in the form of a capital Z.

The lock was on the inside, and fully exposed.

Four screws held it in place, and a small screwdriver would soon have removed it, as Jack perceived while looking at it.

He had a jackknife in his pocket, with a small screwdriver attachment at the end of the handle.

He decided to see if he could make any impression on the screws with it.

The first screw he tackled readily yielded, and he kept on till the lock fell off in his hand.

All he had to do then, was to push the door open and walk out.

"Gee! That was easy," he chuckled. "The doctor would have a fit if he knew how simple it is to get out of that place."

He replaced the lock, leaving the door open.

Then he walked to the cellar stairs, and was soon standing in an entry above.

"If I go to my room and turn in, I'll only catch it worse, though a chap might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I think the punishment the doctor has promised me is beyond reason. Instead of submitting to it, I think now, that I've the chance, I'll slip away to the city, hunt Tom up at the Palmetto House, No. 60 D—— Street, and stay all night and all to-morrow with him. If in the end, I've got to take a caning, I might as well do something to deserve it. After I've had my swing, it won't be so bad to take my medicine."

The idea of going to the city, and having a corking time with his old chum, Tom Lanston, appealed so strong to Jack that he determined to carry the plan out.

"No bread and water for me, to-morrow morning, and no caning either. I wonder what my uncle will say when Dr. Poundexter writes him an account of my misdeeds? The doctor might consider my running away to New Orleans as a sufficient cause to expel me. Well, who cares? This isn't the only academy in the South, thank goodness."

Jack, having decided on his course of action, lost no time in carrying it into effect.

First, it was necessary for him to go to his room for his hat.

He found his three roommates fast asleep, as he expected.

He opened his trunk, and took out the few dollars he had saved up, and then softly leaving the room, descended the stairs and let himself out into the playground through a window.

He crossed the yard, mounted the wall with the help of a plank, and dropped into the shore path that led to Seabrook.

The hamlet was only half a mile away, and he soon reached it.

Following the only street in the place, he was presently in the road leading to the city.

When he passed the open doorway of a small drinking house, he noted that the hour was half-past ten.

"It's early, yet," he said to himself. "If nothing happens to detain me, I should reach the city in an hour, and I hope to find my way to the Palmetto House by midnight."

To an athletic youth like Jack Carter, a five-mile walk was a mere bagatelle.

In fifteen minutes he saw the lights of the suburbs far ahead of him.

An hour later, he was on St. Bernard Avenue, walking straight for the river.

Jack was not very well acquainted with New Orleans.

He hadn't the least idea, where D—— Street was, but judged that it was somewhere near the river, for the Palmetto House being a sailors' boarding-house, according to Tom Lanston, it was likely to be near the water.

When Jack reached the corner of Claiborne Avenue he

saw a policeman, and asked him where D—— Street was.

The officer looked at him sharply.

"Are you going there at this hour of the night?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Jack. "I've got a friend stopping at a sailors' boarding-house called the Palmetto House, and I'm going to stay all night with him."

Jack's answer was straight enough, but it struck the officer as rather odd that a well-dressed boy should be going to the region of the docks at that late hour to sleep with a friend in a rough boarding-house.

The policeman knew nothing about the Palmetto House, but he did know that D—— Street was a tough locality, right in the midst of one of the worst sections of the town, so he deemed it his duty to post Jack, and advise him to postpone his visit until daytime.

Jack, however, had no other place to go, unless he went to a hotel and put up, and he didn't care to do that.

Being a fearless lad he was not frightened at the prospect ahead of him, as sketched by the policeman.

He believed he could reach the Palmetto House all right, if he could get a correct line on its situation, so he told the officer that he was going there if it took him half the night to reach his destination.

The policeman then asked him his name, and where he lived.

Jack gave a fictitious name and address, and after he had noted it down in his memorandum-book, the policeman gave him general directions, advising him to inquire for definite guidance of an officer when he got nearer the river.

The boy said he would, and passed on.

The closer he got to the Mississippi, the more lonesome and deserted the streets became.

It was now after midnight, and pedestrians were few and far between.

Jack's experience with the policeman on Claiborne Avenue made him rather wary of having any dealings with another one.

He decided to make his future inquiries at other sources.

As Jack walked down a tough-looking, narrow street, he saw a stalwart man stagger out of a grogillery and start across the thoroughfare.

At that moment, a rapidly-driven hack, coming from the direction of the river, dashed around the corner.

Jack saw the man's danger and ran forward, shouting to him.

The off-horse struck the big chap and knocked him down, and but for the boy's timely interference, one of the wheels of the vehicle must have passed over his legs.

The driver reined in, as Jack tried to raise the man up.

He seemed to be a sailor, and was somewhat under the influence of liquor.

It was the first time Jack had ever been called on to enact the part of a good Samaritan.

With the assistance of the hackman, who descended from his perch to lend a hand, the half-drunk man was carried to the walk.

There were two persons in the hack.

One of them, who looked like a swell, stuck his head out of the window and asked, with some impatience, what the trouble was.

"Nearly ran a drunken sailor down, sir," replied the *jehu*.

"Why couldn't you look out where you're going?" said the gentleman, angrily.

"He staggered right in front of the horses, before I could turn out."

"Is he badly hurt?"

"I don't believe he's hurt at all. This boy saved him." Jack looked up at that.

The light from a gas-lamp illuminated the gentleman's face, and showed the boy that he certainly belonged to the upper grade of society.

"Well, get up and drive on, then," growled the gentleman.

The driver obeyed, and the hack rattled off, leaving Jack alone with the sailor.

The boy now had a good look at the fellow, under the glare of the gas light, and his appearance was not reassuring.

He was a model of brute strength, not a little resembling some shaggy bison.

His proportions were herculean; his chest wide and deep, his arms long and sinewy, and covered with hair.

His blue, sailor's Guernsey shirt was wide open at the neck, revealing his broad chest, on which was tattooed the figure of a three-masted, full-rigged bark.

His head, close set down on his huge shoulders, was large and covered with a shock of rusty-red hair; his eyes were of a greenish hue, and glared from beneath heavy, bushy brows, while his face was heavily tanned and disfigured from the smallpox.

On the whole, he looked savage, untamable and dangerous.

Jack didn't care for the championship of this gorilla-like individual, and would have left him sitting on the curb, but for the fact that one of the fellow's great, horny hands had clutched him by the arm.

Whether the sailor recognized the boy as his preserver, or whether he was actuated by some other motive, he did not seem disposed to part company with the lad.

"You're all right now," said Jack, anxious to get away from him.

"I reckon I'm always all right, my hearty," replied the sailor, staggering on his feet and at the same time maintaining his grip on the boy. "Who are you, youngster? Yer done me a favor, and Bill Brown ain't one to forget it."

"That's all right. You're welcome, Mr. Brown. As I'm in a hurry, I'd like to get on."

"Mr. Brown!" roared the sailor, peering curiously at Jack. "Don't put no handle to my name. I'm Bill Brown, d'y'e understand?"

Jack understood, for the fellow put emphasis enough on the words.

"Say, where yer goin'?" added the sailor.

"Palmetto House, D—— Street," replied the boy.

"I'm goin' there myself, so we'll sail along together, my lad."

Thus speaking, Bill Brown hooked him by the arm, and Jack, to his great disgust, felt obliged to accompany the villainous-looking seaman.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE "FOUL ANCHOR" DIVE.

As the ill-assorted pair walked along, gradually approaching the region of the docks, Bill Brown seemed to grow more sober.

It might have been the fresh breeze from the river, or the exercise, which seemed to clear his brain.

At any rate, he ceased to stagger, and grew more and more inquisitive as to the boy's business in D—— Street at that hour, for he easily saw that Jack was several pegs above the social status of the slums.

"What yer goin' to the Palmetto House for?" he inquired.

"I'm going to call on a friend of mine."

"A friends of yours, eh? What might his name be?"

"It might be Tom Jones," replied Jack; "but it isn't," he added under his breath.

"Tom Jones? Don't know him. Is he a sailor?"

"Yes."

"What craft does he belong to?"

As Tom Lanston had neglected to insert in his letter the name of the brig he was connected with, Jack couldn't have told Bill Brown if he had been so inclined.

"I don't know her name," he answered.

"Ye don't look like a chap that's hail-fellow-well-met with the sailor man," said Bill Brown, suspiciously. "Who be ye, anyway?"

"I'm a boy."

"I kin see that with half an eye, my hearty. What's yer name?"

"Jack Carter."

"What yer want to see Tom Jones at this here hour, for?"

"'Cause he's an old friend of mine."

"Ain't yer afeard of bein' down 'round the docks at this time of night?"

"No, I'm not."

The tone in which Jack uttered the words, seemed to make an impression on the sailor, for he slapped the boy familiarly on the back, and said:

"It's my 'pinion ye are the right stuff, my hearty. I don't take much stock in boys tucked out like ye be, but I reckon ye are kinder diff'rent from the ord'inary run. Ye done me a good turn, anyway, and Bill Brown kin remember that as well as he kin remember a chap that turns a trick agin' him. It ain't well for no man to cut up nasty with me, let me tell yer. I've done up more'n one feller in my time, and I jest as soon do it ag'in as not," said the sailor, with an imprecation.

Jack believed him, for he looked capable of anything.

"How much, further is it to D—— Street?" Jack asked.

"Don't ye know where the street is, yerself?" asked Brown, with a leer.

"No, I was never in it."

"Then it's lucky for ye, I've got yer in tow. Ye might have run into trouble a dozen times afore ye reached it, for the chaps down here wouldn't like the cut of yer jib. Ye are too swell lookin' for this here locality, and them what looks as if they're out of their reck'ning is apt to run into trouble."

"I'm not looking for trouble, but I can defend myself if attacked."

"What a little fightin' cock ye be," cried the sailor, bursting into a roar of laughter, and fetching Jack another crack on the back which almost knocked the breath out of him. "So ye kin fight, eh? Are ye heeled?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Have ye a knife or a gun?"

"Neither."

"And ye talk of fightin' people what has, ye popinjay. Blame me, if ye ain't as good as a circus."

Bill Brown laughed again.

"You didn't tell me whether we are near D—— Street or not," said Jack.

"We'll come to it pretty soon. Can't ye smell the river?"

Jack knew they were close to the Mississippi, but he couldn't smell it in the literal sense.

He could smell a number of villainous odors from the locality they were threading though.

Every fourth or fifth house seemed to have a saloon on the ground floor, and they were in full blast.

Hard-looking men stood at the bar, sat at the tables, and hung around outside.

Jack clearly aroused the attention of the latter, but he was not interfered with because he was under the convoy of such a tough-looking giant as Bill Brown, and Bill had a reputation in that neighborhood that the ordinary fry felt bound to respect.

It was no secret among them, that Brown had stabbed two men the night before in a brawl, and the papers said that one of them was dead at the hospital, and the other not expected to live.

Several detectives were looking for Big Bill, as he was called, but no one knew better than they that they had a contract on their hands to arrest him in his own stamping grounds.

He was a match for any four men himself, and he could count on help from the tough denizens of the vicinity, who would stand by him on general principles whether they liked him individually or not, for the police were regarded as the common enemy.

Conscious of his great strength, Brown refused to go in hiding; but this was really mere bravado on his part, for if the sailor had one great weakness, it was to be admired for his nerve.

He was willing to take chances in order to make good his bluff, but for all that the ruffian held the police in dread, though he was prepared to fight a dozen of them at a moment's notice.

As they moved down a dark side street, Jack noticed a figure glide out from behind a scaffolding in front of a building that was being repaired, and follow them.

In a moment or two he turned his head to look back at this person, but the man, whoever he was, slipped behind a cask and remained unseen.

Jack looked back again and fancied he saw two men this time, behind them, but they vanished so quickly that he wasn't sure he had seen aright.

It gave the boy an unpleasant sensation to feel that they were being dogged, notwithstanding that he felt his companion was an ugly customer to tackle.

They were now among a colony of high, squalid houses, the abodes of the lowest class of dock laborers, which are a different type in New Orleans than elsewhere.

"Where are you going, now?" asked Jack, hanging back, as Brown turned into a dark, reeking court.

"I'm goin' to get a bite to eat, my hearty. If ye are hungry ye kin eat, too, at my expense."

"I'm not hungry. It must be after one, and I'd like to get to the Palmetto House as soon as possible," protested Jack.

"Ye'd never get there without me. Ye'd be cleaned out and dumped into the river in no time at all, notwithstanding ye think yer a fighter. A blow on the back of the head with a stick or a stone would soon knock all the fight out of yer. Ye don't want to lose me if ye know what's good for yer."

The sailor pulled Jack along with him, and the boy had to go whether he wanted to or not.

They entered an out-of-the-way groggy and eating-house that stood at the end of the court, with a dull, red lamp, upon which was painted a foul anchor, similar to that worn on the shoulder-straps of the officers of the navy, over the narrow door.

The house was known as the "Four Anchor," and was a dive, pure and simple, the upper floors of which were rented to roomers.

Meals could be had at this place at any hour of the day or night, at a long table running crosswise at the back part of the room.

The front part was occupied by a bar and a number of round tables.

There was quite a crowd of habitues in the place, which resounded with boisterous conversation and coarse laughter.

Every eye in the room focused itself on Jack, for he was decidedly out of the swim there, as he followed alongside of Bill Brown.

Everybody knew Bill, and they knew he was "wanted," too.

Whether they liked him or not, they admired his nerve in defying the detectives, several of whom were known to be looking around for the big sailor.

Brown fraternized with a number of sailors in the room, and compared notes with them, talking freely about the scrap in which he had done up the two men.

Jack, who stood by, listening for want of any better occupation, thus learned with a feeling of repulsion and horror, that the man he had saved from being run down by the hack, was to all intents and purposes, a murderer.

"Come, my cockatoo," said Brown at last, to the boy, "we'll tackle a bit of grub. Sit ye down at this here table."

Jack sat down, but kept as far from the sailor as he could now, and Brown rapped on the table for some one to take their orders.

Presently a low-bred Frenchman came from the kitchen.

"So eet ees you, Bill Brown? Mon Dieu! What a nerve you got wiz ze police on ze lookout for you. They been here four, five time to-day, all disguise as longshoremen, but they cannot pull ze sheep's wool ovaire my eyes. Non, non; Pierre Jacquard was not born yesterday. What you vill have, to-night? Eggs and bacon, oui?"

"And coffee," said Brown.

"And you, mon enfant," said Jacquard, turning to Jack. "You vill have ze same?"

"Sure," said Brown. "He takes what I take. Get a move on, monsoo."

The Frenchman grinned and returned to the kitchen, from which Jack soon caught the sounds and odor of frying eggs and bacon.

In a short time the meal was before them, and the sailor pitched in like a hungry man.

Jack had an appetite, though he was not particularly anxious to eat in that den.

As they finished their coffee and Brown pulled out a short pipe for a smoke, the clock behind the bar struck two.

The sailor called for a glass of rum, and to Jack's disgust, seemed to be anchored there for an indefinite time.

"It will be daylight by the time I find the Palmetto House," he muttered. "If I hadn't met this rascal, I would probably be snug in bed with Tom, long before this."

At this moment, two men in the attire of longshoremen, staggered into the room and up to the bar, to which they clung and looked sleepily around, as if three-quarters "shot."

Their eyes rested for an instant on Bill Brown in his swagger attitude, and then their heads fell together and they so remained for a few minutes.

Then one of them reeled to the door, and fell out into the court in the most natural manner in the world.

He picked himself up, and disappeared in the darkness.

The other man called for gin, but wasted the bulk of it in trying apparently, to get it down his throat.

The crowd was too familiar with men in his condition, to pay any particular attention to the seemingly drunken longshoreman, and so he clung around the bar as if it was his only hope.

Jack was the only one who seemed to take any particular notice of the drunken longshoreman.

His actions were as good as a play to him.

Ten minutes might have elapsed while the newcomer hugged the bar in a most affectionate way, when his companion came staggering in again, followed by two companions.

They went to the bar and ordered drinks, and while they were waiting for the barkeeper to serve them, the first man reeled away from the bar toward the back of the room where Bill Brown and Jack still sat at the long table.

Brown glanced at him with a furtive, suspicious glare as he came up.

He staggered against the table and fell over Jack, then straightened up, and putting his hand on the boy's shoulder looked hard at him in an apparently silly way.

"Leave the boy alone," growled Brown, shoving the man away with a force that sent him staggering against the wall.

As he recovered himself with seeming difficulty, the other tipsy fellow, followed by his two companions, made their way to the rear.

Brown didn't seem to like their appearance somehow, and Jack saw him put his hand to his hip.

The action was a signal for a thrilling sensation.

The two apparently drunken men became sober in a

moment, and a revolver appeared in the hand of each, supplemented with weapons in the hands of the other two.

"Throw up your hands, Bill Brown," cried one, sternly. "You're pinched."

With a roar of fury, Brown jumped to his feet, and a wicked-looking knife flashed in the gaslight.

In a moment the room was in confusion, and a dozen revolvers were drawn.

"I'll not be taken alive!" screamed the herculean sailor.

As he spoke the light went out, and the room was enveloped in pitchy darkness.

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE FROM THE "FOUL ANCHOR."

Jack was fairly staggered by what had happened so suddenly.

The tableau his eyes rested on, before the bartender turned the gas off at the meter, was a thrilling one.

Bill Brown was standing drawn up at his full height, like a gigantic wild man at bay, his face convulsed with anger and ferocity, while he held the gleaming knife ready for instant action.

Surrounding him in a semi-circle, were the four men in rough, longshoremen's duds, now revealed as officers of the law, with their revolvers pointed at his breast.

Back of them were two-score of habitues who had drawn weapons, and looked desperate enough for anything.

The young schoolboy expected nothing short of bloodshed when the light went out.

A terrible uproar succeeded the extinguishing of the gas.

The four detectives flung themselves on Bill Brown and pinned him backward over the table.

Jack, in fear of his life, sprang up and jumped against the wall.

The sailor swore, and fought desperately against the detectives.

Somebody crept up to the scene of the fray and fired his gun at random.

The flash illuminated the bunch of struggling men.

Two other revolvers cracked immediately after, and one of the officers fell to the floor, crying out that he was shot.

Bill Brown took advantage of the moment to exert all his great strength.

He swept the three detectives back as if they were children, and sprang on to the table out of their reach.

The table was not designed to stand the shock of his weight, and it went down with a crash.

Jack concluded that things were altogether too hot for him when another pistol cracked, and a bullet struck the wall close to his ear.

He made a dash for the door of the kitchen, and gained it just as Bill Brown came rushing in after him.

The French cook had already fled through the rear entrance into a foul-smelling and narrow yard, leaving the door open.

Through this exit Jack rushed, followed by the big sailor.

In spite of his excitement, Brown recognized the boy and grabbed him by the arm.

"This way, my hearty," he said, pushing Jack toward an open door at the end of the yard.

The uproar behind them was something terrific, for a tremendous fight was going on between the detectives and the crowd.

Both parties were using their weapons, the officers with deadly effect, for their lives depended on routing the enemy.

The fusilade hastened the movements of Brown, and Jack had to keep up with him.

They dashed through a narrow hall or entry from one end of the rear building to the other, thence down a short flight of stairs into a cellar, the odors of which were something horrible to the boy's unaccustomed sense of smell, through a door into another opening between two rookeries that could not be called a yard, and up three rickety steps into another building.

Brown dragged Jack through another hallway, and out into a dirty, narrow court, surrounded by filthy tenements that looked as if they were on the point of toppling over on one another.

Here they found the Frenchman jabbering to a countryman of his.

"Aha, Bill Brown!" he exclaimed. "So you give ze officer ze slip! Bon! You are ze grand wonder."

The sailor made no reply to this speech, but made off down the court, hauling the reluctant boy with him.

"I say, I've had enough of this," objected Jack, when they sallied forth into a narrow street. "I want to go on to the Palmetto House."

"Don't yer worry about the Palmetto House, my hearty," growled the sailor. "Ye are goin' with me."

"I don't see what good I'm doing you," protested Jack.

"Ye ain't doin' me no good, but I'm doin' ye a favor, my popinjay."

"How are you?"

"The detectives have spotted ye in my company, and they'd know yer face ag'in in a minute. Ye'd be pinched the moment they caught sight of yer, and ye wouldn't get less'n ten year," he said, with a hoarse chuckle.

Brown's words greatly startled Jack.

He remembered that just before the trouble began, one of the disguised detectives had looked him straight in the face after falling against him, and he was sure the officer, if he escaped from the "Foul Anchor" dive, would know him again on sight.

Brown noticed his look of consternation, and chuckled again.

"Ye stick by me, youngster, and I'll see yer through," he said.

"Are you going to the Palmetto House now?" asked Jack.

"Not on yer life, my popinjay. We've got to go in hidin' after to-night's work."

"Go in hidin'" gasped Jack.

Big Bill made no reply, but taking care to maintain a firm grip on the boy's arm, he hurried him to the water front, and then began to follow the course of the river in a direction that would take them away from the city.

They met only a few nighthawks abroad at that early hour, and they paid little attention to the burly sailor and his well-dressed companion.

It was a long tramp the boy had to take, and as Bill Brown ceased to be communicative, Jack was thrown back on his own thoughts, which were not of a pleasant kind.

He heartily wished himself back a prisoner in the black hole of the academy, for he realized that he had only jumped from the frying-pan into the fire.

"I'm getting paid up for my folly of running away in the middle of the night," he muttered, disconsolately. "How this adventure of mine is going to end I haven't any idea, but from the present outlook, the prospect is not encouraging."

It was the darkest hour before the dawn, and Jack's feelings were as gloomy as the scene around him and his companion.

He was in the clutches of a rascal who was wanted for murder, and if they were captured together he felt that whatever explanation he might make, would be regarded with suspicion by the authorities.

They were now hurrying along an open part of the river beyond the city limits.

Day was breaking in the east.

Jack was weary after his all-night experiences, and longed for a chance to turn in somewhere.

He asked Brown how much further they were going to walk, but got no answer.

Daylight grew apace, and they still plodded along.

They met early workers on their way to their employment, and saw smoke ascending from a score of chimneys.

At length, an hour after sunrise they reached their destination—a waterside tavern, frequented by freshwater sailors, with a sprinkling of saltwater ones.

Brown was evidently known to the proprietor, for they exchanged cordial salutations.

After a conference, the sailor and Jack were shown two separate rooms to sleep off their fatigue.

The boy was so dead beat that he didn't notice that the key was turned on him, and that he was virtually a prisoner.

He turned into bed, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

Early in the afternoon the proprietor of the tavern, whose name was Wood, looked in on him, and finding that he was still sleeping soundly, relocked the door and went away.

CHAPTER VI.

KIDNAPPED.

Jack slept like a top till close on to dark, when he awoke feeling like his old self once more.

His first impression was one of surprise, on finding himself in a strange room, but he immediately recollected the events of the night, and his spirits fell a bit.

"I'm in a bad scrape, right up to my neck," he muttered. "The only thing I can do is to give this rascally sailor the slip, make my way back to the academy, and take whatever is coming to me. I was a fool to try and find the Palmetto House at such a late hour, after the policeman warned me of the low character of the neighborhood I'd have to pass through to reach it. Well, we all learn by experience, and I sha'n't forget what I've been through, in a hurry."

He got up, dressed himself, and took a good wash.

While he was combing his hair, the door opened, and Bill Brown walked in.

"Hello, my hearty," he said, cheerfully, "how do yer feel now?"

"Pretty good," answered Jack, a bit coldly, for the less he had to do with the herculean sailor, the better satisfied he would be.

"I reckon yer feel like havin' a bite of somethin', don't yer?"

Jack hadn't thought about his stomach till the sailor suggested eating, and then he woke up to the fact that he had a healthy appetite that called for attention.

"Yes, I'm ready to tackle a square meal if I can get it."

"Ye'll get it, my popinjay. It's waitin' for us now, downstairs."

Five minutes later, they were sitting together at a table in a back room overlooking the river with an appetizing spread before them.

Neither spoke during the meal, and after it was over, Brown lighted his pipe and began to smoke.

"How would ye like to go to sea, my hearty?" asked the sailor, after blowing out a cloud of smoke.

"Wouldn't like it at all," replied Jack, shortly.

"I thought all boys were stuck on gettin' out into blue water."

"I'm not."

"Ye said yer name was Jack Carter, didn't yer?"

"I did."

"What part of the city d'ye live in?"

"Don't live in the city."

"Where then?" asked the sailor, staring at him curiously.

"I'm going to school at an academy on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain."

The sailor chuckled.

"Why were ye lookin' for the Palmetto House, so late last night?"

"I wanted to meet a friend of mine who belongs to a brig that's loading for Vera Cruz."

"Very Cruz, eh? It ain't the Shootin' Star, is it?"

"I don't know the name of his vessel."

"Ye said yer friend's name was Tom Jones, didn't yer?" said Brown, with a leer.

"Not Tom Jones, but Tom Lanston."

"Ye don't mean it," chuckled Brown, taking his pipe out of his mouth and blinking at Jack. "So Tom Lanston is a friend of yours?"

"Do you know him?" asked the boy, with a show of interest.

"Do I know him? I reckon I do. He belongs to the Shootin' Star, and so do I."

Jack was astonished.

"I suppose I won't be able to see him now, the way things have turned out."

"Maybe yer will. I reckon I kin fix it. Ye stay here with me. Next Monday I expect the brig to drop down the river and anchor off this here place for a few hours. That'll give yer a chance to see yer friend."

"Oh, I can't hang around here till Monday. I've got to get back to school right away," said Jack, quickly.

"Sorry to disapp'nt yer, but ye can't leave here till I do."

"Why not?" objected Jack, aggressively.

"Well, yer see it wouldn't be safe for me to let yer go."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"The police would be likely to nab yer, and then ye'd give 'em a clue to where I'm hidin'."

"The police won't catch me before I get back to the school, and they'd never think of lookin' there for me."

"Ye think so, do yer? Jest read that there article in the afternoon paper. Maybe ye'll have another think comin'," replied Brown, dryly.

He took a folded newspaper from his pocket, pointed at a certain place, and handed the paper to Jack.

The boy read the story.

It was an account of the affair at the "Foul Anchor" dive, in the small hours of the morning.

It detailed how four detectives had spotted Bill Brown, a sailor, wanted for murder, in the dive, and had tried to get him but failed, owing to the lights being put out and the interference of the habitues of the place.

In the fight that ensued, the sailor escaped, while two detectives were badly wounded, and three of the toughs were killed, and five wounded by the officers.

The only thing that saved the detectives from annihilation, was the sudden appearance of a force of police, who captured two-thirds of those present, including the proprietor.

The article went on to state that a curious thing noted by the detectives was the fact that the big sailor had for a companion a well-dressed, good-looking and apparently respectable boy.

The boy disappeared with the sailor during the scrimmage.

"The police believe they know who the boy is," went on the article. "A lad named Jack Carter, who answers the description of the youth seen in Bill Brown's company, was reported at police headquarters early this forenoon, as missing from the Poundexter Academy near Seabrook. The evidence points to the fact that he ran away from the school last night, and Dr. Poundexter believes he came to the city to meet a young sailor named Tom Lanston, who is stopping at the sailors' boarding-house known as the Palmetto House, at No. 60 D—— Street. A detective on this clue hunted up Lanston, but the young seaman declares that he hasn't seen Jack Carter for a year. He said he wrote to Carter, inviting him to call on him any afternoon of this week. He didn't think it at all probable that his friend would pay his visit after dark, and didn't expect such a thing. He ridiculed the idea that Carter could be in Bill Brown's company. He said it didn't stand to reason. A general alarm has been sent out among the patrolmen to watch for Jack Carter, and as he is supposed to have very little money in his possession, it is expected that he'll soon be rounded up."

"Ye see now, the police all over town is on the lookout for yer. They've got yer description so ye wouldn't be able to escape 'em. There hain't nothin' for yer to do but stay here with me till the brig comes down the river. At any rate, I can't afford to let yer go, so ye might as well consider yerself a fixture here till Monday, d'ye understand?"

Bill Brown spoke in a tone that showed Jack, the sailor didn't mean to part company with him if he could help it, and that fact, taken in connection with his early morning's adventures, made him feel quite depressed.

He noticed that the sailor kept a close watch on him all

the evening, and when he returned to his room to turn in again, he found that the window had been securely nailed up, and so when he heard the key turned in the lock, he knew that he was a prisoner whether he liked it or not.

After that, the time that intervened before Monday morning came around, passed very slowly with Jack.

He was satisfied that his continued absence, taken in connection with Bill Brown's disappearance, would practically confirm the impression, already suspected, that he was the boy reported by the detectives as the rascally sailor's companion.

Bill Brown had kept under cover, and Jack was forced to do likewise, since the two had come to the waterside tavern.

Both the sailor and the proprietor of the house had kept a sharp lookout on all strangers who had come that way, under the idea that they might be disguised detectives.

Nothing happened, however, to greatly worry Brown, and it was with great satisfaction, that he saw the brig, Shooting Star, drop down the river about ten o'clock Monday morning and heave to, off the bend where the tavern was situated.

This unusual act on the vessel's part was in accordance with an arrangement made with Bill Brown by Captain Ryder, who didn't want to lose his big, able seaman, and was willing to run considerable risk in order to get Bill aboard and out to sea.

As soon as the brig hove to, a boat was sent ashore for the sailor.

Brown, who had been on the lookout all morning, was ready to embark the moment the boat reached the small wharf in front of the tavern.

Jack was with him, prepared to pay a short visit to his old chum, Tom Lanston, on board the brig.

Bill Brown had told him that the moment the vessel was ready to proceed on her way, he would be sent ashore at liberty, to go back to school if he wished.

Jack did not suspect that Brown had any motive in getting him aboard the brig.

Brown knew that if he let Jack go free, the police would learn that he, Brown, had sailed on the Shooting Star for Vera Cruz, and that the Mexican authorities would be asked to arrest him on his arrival, pending extradition proceedings.

So the sailor determined that Jack should go in the vessel with him.

The unsuspecting boy stepped into the boat along with Brown, and both were rowed off to the brig.

Brown had managed to communicate his purpose to Captain Ryder a few days before the vessel pulled out of her dock, and the skipper was prepared to receive the boy.

In order to prevent complications, as soon as the boat left for the shore, the skipper called for Tom Lanston, and sent him into the lazarette, the small hold under the cabin, where the brig's stores were kept, with orders to alter the position of certain boxes and packages.

This would keep him employed some time.

When Brown and Jack came over the side, the sailor bade the boy wait till he had a talk with the captain.

The conference was brief, and then Brown led Jack into the forecastle.

"Where's Tom Lanston?" asked the sailor, of the only occupant of the place.

"Down in the forepeak, doin' a job," replied the man.

This was a lie, of course, but it was part of the game to detain Jack aboard.

The forepeak was a small hold under the forecastle, used for stowing spare sails, extra blocks, ropes, and other nautical lumber.

It was entered by a trap door, which was open at the present moment, and through which shone the dim rays of a lantern.

"Go down there and see yer friend," said Brown, drawing Jack over to the trap. "I'll let you know when it's time to go ashore."

The boy was a little dubious about venturing down into the forepeak, but as he supposed Tom Lanston was there, he did not hold back.

There wasn't any ladder, but the drop was only five feet.

"Down with you, my hearty," said Brown. "You'll find Tom somewhere about."

Jack dropped, and as he began to look around for his friend Tom, the trap dropped above his head, and a sea-chest was pulled upon it to keep it down.

Thus, in a twinkling of an eye, Jack Carter, without his own consent, entered on a new career that was to end in making his fortune.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEETING OF JACK AND TOM.

The slamming down of the trap above his head, and the rumble of the sea-chest as it was dragged across it, was the first intimation that Jack had that he was the victim of foul play.

The idea was confirmed when he saw by the light of the lantern, left below for his benefit, that the forepeak had no other occupant than himself.

The moment he was satisfied he had been tricked for some purpose, he reached up and began pounding lustily on the bottom of the trap.

Of course, no attention was paid to him.

In fact, no one was in the forecastle to hear his racket, for as soon as the trap had been secured, Brown and the other sailor went on deck.

A few moments later the yards were braced around, and the Shooting Star continued on her way to the Delta of the Mississippi.

When Jack found that he couldn't budge the trap, and that his thumping produced no results, he desisted and sat down on a coil of rope.

He then felt the motion of the brig as she leaned over to the stiff breeze that swept down the river.

It didn't take much thinking on his part, to understand that he was being kidnapped to sea.

"I'm up against it, for fair," he muttered, "and that blamed sailor I saved from being run over by the hack, is at the bottom of all my misfortunes. That's a poor reward to receive for a humane act. If that rascal had been knocked out he wouldn't have got any more than was coming to him, and I would have escaped a whole lot of trouble. He evidently wants to make a sailor of me in spite of my objections. Well, just wait till I get out of

here and see Tom. He'll put my case before the captain, and then perhaps I'll get justice and be put ashore. I guess it's against the law to carry a person off to sea against his will. If the skipper should refuse to listen to my protests, I don't see why I couldn't have him arrested and punished when we get back. For the present, I may as well take things philosophically, since there is nothing to be gained by butting my head against a stone wall."

Jack blinked at the lantern ruefully, while his thoughts went back to the school which he had left so unexpectedly.

"The boys are no doubt wondering what has become of me," he said to himself. "I'll bet the doctor keeps the wires hot between the academy and police headquarters, asking whether any clue has been found to my whereabouts. He's itching to give me that promised caning, but I don't think he'll be able to lay it on any harder than he intended in the first place. If I have to go all the way to Vera Cruz and back, the performance will have to be postponed for some time."

It was all of a hundred mile run down the river to the Delta, and as Bill Brown, with the skipper's permission, intended to keep Jack under hatches until the brig struck the Gulf of Mexico, the boy was up against a long spell of confinement.

The vessel was twenty miles below New Orleans when the mid-day meal was served out to the crew.

About one o'clock, Bill Brown hauled the chest off the trap and opened it up.

"Hello, my hearty, how are ye feelin' below there?" he asked, with a malicious grin.

Jack looked up from his seat on the rope coil.

"How do you suppose I'm feeling?" he asked, in no pleasant tone. "A nice trick you played on me. I dare say you are carrying me to sea after promising me that I could return to school as soon as I had seen my friend Tom. A fine return I've got for helping you last night when that hack knocked you down; but I oughtn't to expect anything better from such a rascal as you are."

Bill Brown chuckled.

"I've brought yer some dinner, my popinjay. Here's a plate of beef and potatoes, some soft 'tack and a tin of coffee. Reach up and get 'em," he said.

"How long are you going to keep me a prisoner here?" asked Jack, as he accepted the food.

"Till we're out of the river."

"Where's Tom Lanston? Is he on board?"

"He is."

"Does he know I'm here?"

"Not he. He won't know you're aboard till ye walk up and shake hands with him."

"I guess the captain will have something to say about the way you've treated me, when I see him."

The sailor grinned.

"When yer see the cap'n it'll be too late for him to do anythin' for yer. Ye'll have to go to Vera Cruz. It will be a nice little v'yage for yer. Me and yer friend Tom'll show yer the ropes, and make a sailor of yer."

"I have no wish to be a sailor."

"Oh, ye'll change yer mind when yer get into the Gulf."

"I think this is an outrage."

"It's the best thing that ever happened to yer, my hearty."

True things are often uttered in jest.

Bill Brown did not dream that his words were destined to have a prophetic fulfillment.

He slammed down the trap, replaced the chest, and went on deck.

The long afternoon slipped slowly by to Jack, who had nothing but his thoughts to amuse himself with.

He examined the confines of the forepeak hold with the assistance of the lantern, and made himself familiar with its miscellaneous contents.

By this time he was used to the smell of tarred rope, and the other odors of the place, and he did not notice them any more.

He found that there was another trap leading down into the forward hold.

He pulled it up by the ring, and flashed the lantern light upon a lot of bags stowed tightly into the nose of the vessel.

Just before the men were called to their tea, Brown brought Jack his supper and a couple of blankets.

"Hand me the other dishes, my young barnacle," he said, "and take yer supper down. As the brig is only half way down the river, ye'll have to spend the night where ye are, so here's a couple of blankets to serve ye for a bed."

Brown shut the trap, yanked the chest on top of it and departed.

At eight bells (eight o'clock), when the first night watch went on duty, Jack heard a number of feet moving around above his head.

It was the middle watch who went on duty at midnight, that were turning in for a four hours' sleep.

When these men were called on deck, the brig was approaching quarantine at the head of the Delta passages.

An hour later she entered the Southwest Pass that would take her straight into the Gulf.

Long before that, Jack, rolled up in the blankets, had become oblivious to his surroundings, and was dreaming that he was back at school.

The morning watch was on duty when Bill Brown shoved the chest off the trap for the last time, and opened the trap.

It was six o'clock, and broad daylight.

No daylight penetrated the forepeak hold, and the lantern had long since gone out.

Jack was still sleeping as calmly as if he was in bed at his room in the academy.

"Ahoy, below, there, my hearty!" roared the herculean sailor.

The hail awoke Jack and he sat up, looking around him in a bewildered way.

"Come now, my popinjay, tumble up, and be lively about it," cried Brown.

As Jack caught a dim view of his rascally countenance looking down at him, he recalled the disagreeable experience of the previous day.

"What do you want?" growled the boy.

"Get up! Toss them blankets up and foller yerself, d'ye hear?"

Jack threw up the blankets, and then with the help of one of Brown's great paws, he emerged from the gloom of the hold.

He found himself in the forecastle of the brig.

It was lighted by the dull glow of the slush-lamp, swinging from the ceiling, and the murky light that shone through the hatchway entrance which did not help things much, as the sky was overcast.

The boy made out several sleeping forms stretched upon bunks against the curving sides of the brig.

"On deck with yer, now," said the big sailor, pushing Jack toward the short ladder leading up to the entrance to the "sailors' parlor."

Jack obeyed, and presently stood on the raised forecastle deck.

Another pair of steps pointed the way to the main deck.

"There's the galley, yonder. Ye'll find a basin and water in a barrel to sluice yer face with," said Brown.

Jack proceeded to the place indicated, and was soon indulging in a wash-up.

After drying his hands and face in a not overclean towel, he gazed around the deck of the brig.

The morning watch had just finished washing down the deck, and were putting away the hose and other implements they had used.

One, a bright, stalwart-looking young chap, stopped and stared at Carter.

Jack stared back at him.

Then they recognized each other.

"Tom Lanston!" cried Jack, joyfully, stepping forward.

"Jack Carter! Is it possible it is you?" ejaculated the other, in amazement.

CHAPTER VIII.

WRECKED.

"Yes, it's me, all right," replied Jack, with a rueful look.

"How and when did you come aboard, old man?" asked Tom. "Did you run away from school? There's been a lot about you in the papers last week."

"I came aboard yesterday morning with a rascally chap called Bill Brown, who belongs to this brig. He gave me to understand that the vessel was going to remain up the river at the place where we came off long enough for me to have a talk with you. Then I was to be sent ashore so I could go back to the academy."

"You came aboard yesterday morning!" ejaculated Tom, in surprise.

"Yes."

"This is the first time I've seen you. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Brown took me into the forecastle and told me you were down in the hold under the floor. I saw an open trap and a light shining up, so I believed him. He told me to jump down there and I'd find you. I did so, whereupon he slammed down the trap and made me a prisoner. I've been there up to a few minutes ago."

"The dickens you say!" cried Tom. "A plain case of kidnapping, for we're now well out in the Gulf and you can't get back. You'll have to go with us to Vera Cruz now."

"I'll go, of course, if I can't help myself; but I think it's an outrage."

"Of course, it is. I can't imagine why Brown enticed you on board. You're not a sailor, and would have to

learn the ropes before you could be of any use. By the way, the papers said that a boy answering your description was with Brown in the 'Foul Anchor' dive last Tuesday morning, when the detectives tried to capture him. Was it really you?"

"I'm sorry to say, it was."

"How came you to be with Brown, in such a tough place?"

Before Jack could answer, the second mate, who was in charge of the deck, came up and ordered Tom to get a move on, so Lanston had to walk off, and the explanation his friend was about to give him, was postponed until another time.

"Well, young fellow," said the mate to Jack, "who are you?"

"My name is Jack Carter. I was kidnapped aboard this vessel by one of your sailors, named Bill Brown. I want to see the captain about it," said Jack.

As the two mates were in the secret of Jack's presence aboard the brig, the second officer was really not surprised when he saw the boy on deck.

"The cap'n hasn't turned out yet," he replied. "You'll have to wait till he does."

"What's his name?"

"Ryder. He's a short, stout, red-faced man. You'll see him on the poop afore long, and then you can go up there and speak to him."

The poop was the roof of the cabin, and after the mate walked away, Jack kept his eyes in that direction.

The members of the watch on deck eyed Jack, with surprise and curiosity.

With the exception of Bill Brown, they had been ignorant of the boy's presence on board.

The big sailor came over to our hero.

"Ye kin have a cup of coffee at the galley, my popinjay. It'll brace yer up while yer waitin' for breakfast, which won't be served awhile yet. Come over and I'll introduce yer to the doctor."

Hooking Jack by the arm, he carried him to the galley, where a big negro was busy at the range.

"Here, Johnson," said the sailor, "a tin of coffee for this young chap. He's goin' to Vera Cruz with us, though he hain't signed the brig's papers yet."

The colored cook grinned, and handed Jack a tin cup of smoking hot coffee.

Brown left him drinking it, at the galley door.

Captain Ryder made his appearance on the poop, about seven o'clock.

Jack, as soon as he saw the skipper, started aft to enter his protest against the outrage to which he had been subjected.

The captain regarded him with some curiosity as he approached.

Jack introduced himself, and stated his case.

The skipper pretended to sympathize with the boy, assuring him that he would gladly put him ashore if the thing was possible, but under the circumstances it wasn't, so he said Jack would have to go to Vera Cruz in the brig.

"You'll have to work your way there and back, so you might as well sign the articles and draw whatever wages I find you're worth," said Captain Ryder.

As there didn't seem to be any alternative, Jack agreed, and wrote his name on the brig's articles.

The skipper then called the second mate, and told him to fit Jack out with such duds and other things as he would need out of the brig's chest, and take him into his watch.

Thus, by the time the men were called to breakfast, Jack, as far as outward appearances went, was as much a sailor as his chum, Tom Lanston.

After breakfast the morning watch, to which Jack had been assigned, was off duty.

Tom took him down into the forecastle, and asked him to tell all that had happened to him since he left school.

"Your letter was at the bottom of the whole thing," said Jack.

"My letter! How is that?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Well, if you hadn't sent it, I wouldn't be aboard this brig now. Nevertheless, old man, you're not to blame for what has happened to me."

Jack then proceeded to tell Tom how he had learned that a letter bearing a New Orleans postmark had arrived at the school for him.

He described how he got possession of Tom's letter after he found the doctor had held it back, probably meaning to destroy it.

He went on to tell how Dr. Poundexter had surprised him reading it in his room when he was supposed to be in bed, and what followed.

After that, he told about leaving the school with the intention of meeting Tom at his boarding-house on D—Street, explaining how he came across Bill Brown in one of the streets near the docks, and all that happened to him since that unfortunate meeting.

"You had a tough time of it, Jack," admitted Tom. "And now you are making the best of a bad bargain, I see. You have signed for the trip to Vera Cruz and back."

Jack nodded.

"Well, I'm glad to have you along. You won't find things so bad aboard this hooker, though Brown is a hard proposition, and a favorite of the skipper. I'll make a sailor of you before you get back to New Orleans, and maybe they'll kill the fatted calf for you when you return to the academy."

"They will, like fun," replied Jack. "What I won't catch from the doctor is hardly worth mentioning."

The boys spent the whole of the forenoon watch below, talking together.

When they were called on deck dinner was ready, and they ate it together.

The weather had been changing for the worse ever since sunrise, and it was now blowing a half gale.

Jack was soon as sick as a dog, and the second mate allowed him to go below.

He turned in on a spare bunk, and tossed and groaned for the rest of the afternoon.

The weather kept on growing worse and worse, and by dark a heavy gale was tossing the brig about on a heavy sea.

As the captain was unable to take his sights that day at noon, the vessel was run on a dead reckoning.

Jack passed a terrible night, caring little whether the brig went to the bottom or not, so miserable was he.

The storm was worse, if anything, next day, the skipper

declaring that it was one of the heaviest he had ever faced in the Gulf.

Jack was not interfered with, and Tom condoled with and encouraged him during the day, telling him he would be all right before another morning dawned.

About dark, Tom brought him some broth that he had prevailed on the cook to prepare for him, and though Jack declared he couldn't touch a mouthful, he was persuaded to try, and ended by drinking it all up.

"You ought to feel better after that," said Tom.

"I do," replied Jack.

"Then you'd better come on deck and get a whiff of the sea air. It will make you feel a whole lot better."

Jack replied that he was so weak, and the brig rolled and pitched so much, that he wouldn't be able to keep his feet.

Tom, however, got him to go on deck, and the change brought him around very fast.

So much so indeed, that when he saw the crew at supper, he felt uncommonly hungry himself, and got away with his share, much to Tom's satisfaction.

The brig was holding her course south by west, as near as the skipper could figure her position, hoping that the gale would break before morning.

Instead of breaking, the wind whipped around to another quarter, and blew worse than ever.

The night as it advanced became so dark, that the brig seemed to be sailing through a dense, black chaos, the pall-like obscurity of which was only relieved by the white crests of the waves, appearing here and there like spectral figures.

The second mate's watch was on duty from midnight until four.

It was close on to the latter hour that the brig, under scarcely any canvas, ran smack upon the dangerous reefs surrounding a small island known by the name of San Sebastian.

This island lay about three hundred miles east of the Mexican coast.

Captain Ryder supposed he was at least one hundred miles east of this island, which was not inhabited, according to common account.

That showed how far out of her right course the storm had blown the brig.

No wooden vessel ever built, could survive the shock of contact with those reefs under similar circumstances.

As the Shooting Star was an old craft, her fate was sealed with surprising quickness.

She went to pieces like the collapsing of a house of cards, and every soul aboard of her was battling for his life inside of a minute, after she struck.

The entire watch on deck was swept overboard by the first big sea.

The mate and two of the men went down, and never came up again.

The other three—Bill Brown, Tom and Jack—were more fortunate, for the time being, at any rate.

Each grasped a piece of wreckage with the tenacious grip of a drowning person, and were whisked away toward the island itself—three atoms of life on a boiling and boisterous sea.

CHAPTER IX.

ASHORE ON THE MYSTIC ISLE.

To his dying day, Jack never could tell how he managed to cling to that piece of wreckage which the seas buffeted about like a cork.

He did hold on, however, or this story would never have been written.

A person is capable of a whole lot under certain circumstances, even when in a semi-conscious condition.

The shore of the island of San Sebastian is remarkable for its rocky and inhospitable character.

It is almost entirely surrounded by a circle of the most dangerous reefs in the world.

That is the reason why it is rarely visited by a vessel, and offers no inducement for any one to settle there.

Only for a space of a hundred feet in one part of the eastern shore is there a break in its rocky walls.

Through this hole runs a deep channel connecting with a landlocked haven, not over a quarter of a mile in circumference.

It was toward this opening that the three pieces of wreckage, with their living burdens were swept.

Some special providence carried them through into the comparatively still water of the haven, where they were thrown upon the level, sandy beach.

At no other point in the whole circumference of the island would Bill Brown, Jack and Tom have had the ghost of a chance for their lives.

The three survivors of the wreck were so exhausted by the time they were pitched on the beach, that they lay a long time without giving any sign of life.

The darkness was just as intense around them here, as it had been on the deck of the brig before she struck on the reef, and the roar of the gale outside, sounded like a pitched battle between legions of fiends.

Bill Brown, as might be expected of one of his herculean build, was the first to recover.

Whether he was astonished to find himself alive and un-hurt after what he had been through, we cannot say.

At any rate, he didn't think of thanking Heaven for his preservation, for there was nothing in common between himself and a Supreme Being.

He simply pulled himself together, looked around him in the gloom, and came to the conclusion that he was the only survivor of the wreck, or if there were others, they could shift for themselves as far as he was concerned.

Every one for himself was his motto, and he held to that every time.

The beach presenting no attractions for him, the big sailor walked away from it.

While he couldn't but walk at random, luck directed his steps to the only opening in the wall of rock surrounding the little haven.

It was a pass not over fifteen feet wide, yet he went straight through it without knowing anything about its character, and was soon in an open valley beyond, where the tropical vegetation grew wild and luxuriant to an extraordinary extent.

On, on through the night he walked, looking for some traces of civilization, and there we will leave him and re-

turn to the beach of the haven, to see how matters fared with Jack and his friend Tom.

For some little time after the departure of Brown, the boys remained in their half-conscious state, more dead apparently, than alive.

Then Tom sat up and looked around.

The howl of the storm, and the roar of the surf on the rocks against the island's rocky barriers outside, met his ears, and he wondered where he was.

The intense darkness prevented him seeing anything.

He could feel that he was on a sandy shore, out of range of the surf.

He then began to remember things, and his thoughts recurred to Jack.

"He's lost, no doubt, poor old chap. Old Nick must have been at my elbow, when I wrote that unfortunate letter which brought so much trouble on Jack. I shall never forgive myself for writing it, for it has made me the innocent cause of his death. It doesn't seem possible that I'm ashore on the Mexican coast, for the brig never could have reached it since we left the Delta. We were five hundred miles to the north and east of it when the gale came on good and hard. If I'm on an island, I haven't the faintest notion where it is, for there are blamed few islands in this part of the Gulf as far as I have any idea of. Well, I must look around and see what kind of place it is. Seems funny that the surf sounds so far away and that the wind is so light, when I can hear it roaring above my head like fun. I wonder if I'm in some kind of a sea cave?"

Tom started slowly along the beach, for the gloom was so thick that he felt impelled to be cautious.

He had traveled about a dozen yards, when he tripped over a piece of wreckage and went down on his hands and knees.

"Who's that?" came a voice out of the darkness, a few feet away.

With a thrill of joy, Tom recognized Jack's familiar tones.

"Is that you, Jack?" he asked.

"Why, Tom, are you saved, too?" cried Jack, with a happy ring to his voice.

"I'm alive, that's about all I can claim, at present," answered Tom, walking in the direction of his chum.

In a moment they were together, shaking hands and congratulating themselves that they had escaped from the greedy maw of the sea.

"I suppose others of the crew have got ashore, too, and maybe the skipper and officers as well, though it hardly seems likely that many could have escaped," said Tom. "Seems to me I was hours tumbling about in the sea, till I finally realized that I was on the solid ground once more."

"Say, where do you suppose we are?" asked Jack. "It seems quite calm around us, though I can hear a great roaring of wind and water close by."

"I haven't the least idea where we are," replied Tom. "It's too dark to move around much. We might walk a little way and see if we fetch up against anything."

They walked a hundred feet and came against a rocky barrier, which they followed for a short distance till they discovered that it ran into the water.

"We can't go any further in this direction," said Tom. "We might as well squat down somewhere and wait till daylight. I don't believe we can gain much by stumbling about in the dark."

Jack agreed with his friend, and so they sat down with their backs against the rock and put in their time talking about the past, present and future.

The backbone of the storm was already broken, and it steadily decreased as daylight approached.

The boys thought that night would never end, but at last the sky began to grow less gloomy, especially in the east.

Soon they could make out the rough outlines of the rocks around them.

When day finally broke, the scene lightened up rapidly.

They saw that they were on the shore of a landlocked basin, surrounded by rock.

The water in this miniature harbor was only moderately agitated by the waves that dashed in at the narrow entrance.

Through the opening they could see the turbulent waters of the Gulf rising and falling to the very limit of their vision.

Besides themselves there was no sign of life anywhere, that they could see.

"Looks as if we were the only ones who have come ashore, in this particular locality," said Tom. "We were uncommonly lucky to hit this place. There must be a strong drift in through that narrow passage."

"Say, isn't that a hut, yonder?" said Jack, pointing at a section of the curved beach.

"By George, it is!" replied Tom. "Probably it was built out of wreckage by some castaways and deserted when they were taken off. Let's go over and look at it. It would make a shelter for us if we have to stay here any time."

Accordingly, the boys walked along the shore till they came to the hut, the door of which was closed.

Pushing the door open, they entered.

As they did so, an object started up from a couch of dried vegetation and gazed at them in a bewildered way.

The boys uttered an ejaculation of surprise, for they saw that it was a girl.

CHAPTER X.

THE GIRL CASTAWAY.

The girl threw the long hair back from her face, and gazed intently at the young intruders.

"Where did you come from?" she asked, eagerly.

"From the sea, miss," replied Jack. "We were wrecked on this shore during the night."

"Wrecked!" she said, in a disappointed tone.

"Yes. Our vessel, the brig *Shooting Star*, from New Orleans, struck on the rocks somewhere yonder," said Jack, waving his hands in the direction he supposed the catastrophe had occurred. "Were you wrecked here, too, miss?"

"Yes. Three weeks ago," she replied. "I was a passenger in the ship *Midnight*, bound from Vera Cruz to Charleston, South Carolina. She went on the reef that's around this island in a storm and everybody was lost, save me."

"You don't say," said Tom. "Everybody lost but you,

that was tough. How have you managed to live? Surely you didn't build this hut all by yourself?"

"No. I found this house just as you see it. As for living, that was easy. The island is overrun with many varieties of tropical fruit, such as bananas, plantains, cocoanuts, figs, oranges and so forth. Then there are lots of shell-fish to be found among the rocks at low water. And there is fish, too, but I had not means of catching any. I have lived chiefly on fruit and raw shell-fish. I have been hoping that some vessel would put in here and take me off, but though I have seen many ships in the distance, none ever came close enough to the island for me to make a signal that those on board would be able to distinguish."

"I should think you would find this place awfully lonesome if you are the only inhabitant," said Jack, who had not failed to notice that the girl was particularly attractive both in face and figure.

"I have found it so," she answered.

"Is it a large or small island?"

"It's a small one, and entirely surrounded by rocks. With the exception of a small valley filled with tropical trees, most of them bearing fruit, the rest of the island seems one mass of rock, rising into inaccessible heights."

"Well, I suppose we ought to introduce ourselves, miss, seeing that we are companions in hard luck. My name is Jack Carter. This is my friend, Tom Lanston."

The fair girl bowed and smiled.

"My name is Kittie Raymond. I am an orphan. My father who was a railroad contractor in the employ of the Mexican Government, died six months ago, and I was on my way to Charleston to live with my aunt when the vessel I sailed in was wrecked here."

Jack then explained how he had been a student at the Poundexter Academy until he ran up against hard luck which ended in his being kidnapped to sea and shipwrecked on the island.

Tom then told her that he had been following the sea for his living for the past year, and his present misfortune was his first during that time.

"I see you have a supply of fruit in the hut. If you will let us sample it we will gather more to replace it," said Jack.

"Help yourself to as much as you want," she answered. "There is an inexhaustible supply within a short distance."

"Then suppose we all sit down to breakfast. I can't say that I fancy an all-fruit diet, but when that comprises the entire bill of fare, and I am hungry to boot, I am not going to kick. If we stay here long, I dare say I shall get used to taking things as they come."

Miss Raymond excused herself till she could wash her face and fix her hair up a bit, using her hands for both comb and brush.

When she returned to the hut, the boys were piling into the fruit at a great rate.

The girl ate her share, the trio of unfortunates conversing together like old friends.

When they had satisfied their appetites, they left the hut.

It was now bright daylight, and the sun was trying to force his way through the still overcast heavens.

The wind had gone down considerably, and it was easy

to see that the gale of the past two days was practically over.

Miss Raymond led the boys through the pass, trodden some hours before by Bill Brown, of whose escape the boys had not the slightest knowledge, and into the fertile tropical valley enclosed in an amphitheater of rocks.

An inaccessible wall of rock, rising a hundred feet in the air, ran directly across the valley and, judging from a tall peak they saw in the distance, cut off the larger part of the island.

The curiosity of the boys was aroused as to what kind of landscape was beyond that rocky wall, but a cursory examination of it indicated that it was absolutely impassable.

The three walked around, inspecting the different varieties of fruit growing on the island, and the sight made the mouths of the boys water.

There was enough ripe fruit on the trees to feed a small army.

After going over a good part of the valley, they returned to the haven again.

"I'm afraid life on this island is pretty slow," said Jack. "I haven't seen the least thing yet to amuse a fellow."

"That's right," nodded Tom, "it is as slow as thick molasses. In order to see the Gulf, even, you've got to climb among the rocks. I hope we won't have to stay here long."

The hut was large enough to be divided into two fair-sized sections, so Jack and Tom decided to put up a partition, which they could easily do as the beach of the haven was strewn with planks and other debris that had come ashore from the wreck.

They gathered a supply of the planks, but before starting in with the partition Jack and Tom went among the rocks and gathered a lot of shell-fish.

Jack found that he had quite a number of matches left in his match-safe, which was practically water-tight, and so he built a fire and they cooked the shell-fish among the embers.

Tom added cooked plantains to the bill of fare, for it happened that he knew how to prepare them for the table, having often seen the cook of the Shooting Star do it.

Miss Raymond and Jack both declared that the cooked fruit was delicious.

In its raw state the girl had found the plantain uneatable.

As matches were at a premium and driftwood at a discount, it was decided to keep the fire going after a fashion, so that they wouldn't have to relight it when they were ready to cook more shell-fish and plantain for supper.

This duty was assigned to the girl, while the boys got busy with the partition, which they finished in about an hour by digging a trench from the back of the hut nearly to the door, into which they stuck the ship's planks upright, and then filling in the trench as their work proceeded, packing the earth down solid.

They managed to run two horizontal planks across under the roof of the cabin to hold the upper ends of the partition planks.

When the job was completed, it was unanimously voted a very fair one, taking in consideration the rude method the boys were forced to employ in the absence of any tools

other than their sheath knives such as every sailor wears at sea.

The next thing Jack and Tom did was to remove their shoes and stockings and climb the arm of rock that made the haven landlocked.

It was quite a task to reach the summit of this barrier, although it was not much higher than forty feet on the average from the beach, as it was difficult to scale.

The view they secured from the top, embraced a wide expanse of the horizon.

The water of the Gulf was still very rough.

They could see the waves breaking over the sweeping line of reef which seemed to have no end in either direction.

There wasn't a sign of the wreck of the Shooting Star.

The ill-fated craft had vanished into her watery grave.

The surf-lashed rocks outside in the immediate vicinity of the haven were thickly strewn with flotsam from the lost brig.

The lighter portions of her cargo were in evidence, either bobbing about on the waters, or stranded here and there in nooks and crannies of the iron-bound shore.

Among other things the boys discovered a couple of sea-chests wedged in among the rocks, and they saw other boxes, the contents of which they thought might prove of value to them.

The problem was how to get at these things.

Tom solved it by pointing to a quantity of rope that had come into the haven.

"We'll rig lines up and down on both sides of this rocky wall," he said. "Then we will be able to ascend and descend without great difficulty."

"You will, for you're a sailor," replied Jack; "but it won't come so easy for me to do the monkey act."

"Well, you can remain up here, while I do the strenuous part, then," replied Tom. "We'll get the rope, and after we get it secured in place by attaching the ends to a couple of rocks up here, I'll see whether we can haul up any of the boxes with the aid of another rope. If we can't, I'll break the boxes open somehow and rig some kind of an arrangement for sending up their contents in sections. We'll have to do that anyhow with the sea-chests, for it would not be possible for us to haul them up over these rocks."

Tom's scheme being voted the proper caper, the boys set about getting the rope from the beach, and rigging the lines on the plan that life-lines are secured across the deck of a vessel before an approaching gale, only these lines ran up and down at a very acute angle.

There was plenty of rope on the beach to make one line reaching from the shore of the haven to the summit of the rocky barrier, and another from the top of the rocks to the surf line on the outside.

There was more rope stranded on the rocks above the present sea line.

Jack remained on top of the rocks while Tom, being a spryer climber descended and brought the rope up.

Selecting a suitable projecting stone, the two lines were secured to it, and then Tom, with the help of the outside rope, made his way down to the surf to get the rope that lay like a long sinuous snake among the rocks.

Securing the guide line around his waist as a support and to leave his hands at liberty, he picked up the nearest

end of the rope and pulled the whole length of it till he had quite a coil at his feet.

One of the sea-chests was close at hand.

It was firmly wedged into a crevice that seemed to have been made to receive it.

Tom smashed the lid in with a small boulder and threw the fractured part up, revealing a lot of clothing and a hundred odds and ends, including a brace of revolvers and several boxes of cartridges.

The chest had evidently been the property of Captain Ryder.

While Tom was considering how he should send the stuff up to Jack, he saw a large wicker basket with a narrow mouth tumbling about in the surf.

"That's just the thing I want. Jack can haul the stuff up in that without much danger of it falling out," thought Tom.

It proved to be no easy matter to secure the basket, and Tom got several good drenchings before he managed to catch hold of it, but in that hot climate a ducking didn't count for much.

Tom carried one end of the hauling line up to Jack, and then slid down to the water line again.

As fast as Jack hauled up the basket full of stuff, he tossed the articles down on the hard beach of the haven.

Kittie Raymond was called upon to pick them up and carry them to the cabin.

She was very glad to help the boys in any way she could.

When the chest had been emptied of its contents, Tom tied one of the boxes to the end of the rope and Jack pulled it up.

He lowered it on the other side, and Kittie took charge of it.

In this way a great many things were recovered before the lowness of the sun in the sky warned the boys to quit operations for the day.

More shell-fish and plantain were cooked in the glowing embers of the fire for supper, and the meal was hardly finished before night fell with tropical suddenness, only a short twilight intervening between daylight and dark.

After an hour spent in conversation, the boys declared that they were played out, and as Kittie was accustomed to going to roost early, all hands turned in and were soon asleep.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WHO VANISHED.

On the following morning the boys, after breakfast, resumed their task of securing the stranded stuff on the outside of the rocky barrier.

Inside of a couple of hours, they had stripped the surf-line of everything that promised to be of any use to them.

Then they sorted the various articles over.

The contents of the two chests promised to be the most useful.

The most valuable articles in the boys' eyes was a fine fishing line, and a tin case containing six dozen boxes of matches.

The latter prize was hailed with great satisfaction, for it assured them of fire to cook the fish they might catch and the plantains.

One of the boxes contained an assorted supply of pepper, salt, mustard and such things.

The salt and pepper were considered great prizes.

The boys gathered a fresh supply of fruit before dinner, and after the meal they spent the afternoon exploring the rocks in the vicinity of the haven.

"Suppose a vessel heaves in sight and passes, say within a mile of the reef, how are we to signal her?" asked Jack.

"The only way I know of, would be for us to build a fire up here somewhere, and after it got started throw on a quantity of green branches so as to create a smoke, provided the wind was light so that the smoke would ascend into the air," replied Tom.

"I don't see any suitable place for building such a fire," replied Jack. "It ought to be a good one in order to make smoke enough to attract attention. Even then, the people aboard the vessel might not take it for a signal, and our trouble would go for nothing."

"That's the chance we've got to take, old man. This isn't an island that is likely to be visited often. It is probably understood to be uninhabited, and the reef makes it dangerous of approach. I'm willing to bet that the skippers of all craft sailing the Gulf, give this island a wide berth on general principles."

"At that rate, we're liable to have to stay here for an indefinite time," replied Jack, in a gloomy tone.

"I'm afraid that is about the size of it. We're about as bad off as Robinson Crusoe was, so far as a rescue is concerned, from the looks of things."

"I think that is fierce."

"It might be worse, for we are not likely to starve here, if we have to remain a year."

"A year! Holy smoke! If I thought I had to stay a year in this place, I'd have a fit," said Jack.

"I hope you won't have any such thing, for we haven't a doctor to attend to you," chuckled Tom.

"Don't get funny. This position we're in, isn't any joke."

"No, I don't think it is, but I don't see any use kicking over it."

"There's a sail now," said Jack, pointing to a white speck miles away. "Do you think it's coming this way?"

"No, the craft is heading east. She's as near to us now as she is likely to be."

"That settles it. Let's go down and talk to Miss Raymond. She must be getting lonesome, we've been so long away."

"She was a deal more lonesome before we turned up, so we needn't worry about her."

"She's a pretty girl, don't you think?"

"She's pretty, all right. You seem to be kind of struck with her."

"Get out, you're dreaming," replied Jack, with a flush.

Tom laughed tantalizingly, for he had noticed how attentive his companion was to the fair castaway.

While they were speaking they were descending the rocks, and in a few minutes were standing before the girl who greeted them with a smile.

Tom noticed, without jealousy, that the smile was more for Jack than for himself.

"Those two will be spooning before the week is up," he said to himself. "I'm glad that girls don't worry me."

He walked off down the beach, leaving Jack and the girl together.

Next morning the three castaways started after breakfast, to more fully explore the valley.

The boys each carried a revolver and a supply of cartridges, not because they expected they would need the weapons to defend themselves, but on what Jack called general principles, "because," he said, "you never can tell what might happen."

The boys were eager to find out whether or not they could penetrate that remarkable wall of rock that ran across the island, for the exploring fever was strong upon them, and they wanted to know something about the other part of the island which seemed to be entirely cut off from the fertile valley section.

"This seems to be a most astonishing kind of island," remarked Jack, as they walked along close to the wall of rock. "Here's a shut-in valley, fairly overrun with the choicest varieties of tropical fruit, while the rest of the island appears to be a mass of bleak rock of no use whatever. Funny how nature runs things sometimes, isn't it?"

"I've heard the sailors aboard the Shooting Star tell yarns about more curious places than this island, that they'd seen in their time," said Tom. "Nobody knows what's in this world till they get to knocking around it."

"If we could get on top of this wall of rock and build a fire there, I'll bet it would attract attention aboard any vessel passing this way," said Jack.

"That's right; but the people would probably think it was a new volcano that was breaking out, and they wouldn't come close enough to investigate the matter," replied Tom.

"Even if we were to build a fire signal on the rocks around the island, you say that the reef would prevent a vessel coming close in."

"So it would. However, the cap'n could send a boat if he thought there were castaways on this island, anxious to be taken off. Some skippers wouldn't take the trouble of doing it, for time is money these days, and castaways are not usually overburdened with coin to pay their passage to port."

"Do you mean to say that any captain would refuse to take shipwrecked people off an island?"

"Sure—lots of them. I have heard two skippers say so."

"They ought to be put in jail," replied Jack, indignantly.

"There are a lot of people who deserve to go to jail, but they don't get there just the same. For instance, Bill Brown managed to keep from getting behind the bars."

"That's because he was born to be drowned."

At that moment Kittie uttered a suppressed exclamation, and grasped Jack by the arm.

"What's the matter, Miss Kittie?" asked the boy.

"I saw a curious-looking man walk out of that grove yonder, and vanish behind that big rock you see down there," she said, pointing.

"A curious-looking man!" exclaimed Jack. "Why, I thought the island was uninhabited. You've been here three weeks and you said you didn't see a soul during that time."

"I didn't see anybody till you and your friend came; but I saw a man just now as plainly as I see you both."

"It's a wonder we didn't see him, too. You are sure it was a man?"

"Positive. He looked something like a Mexican peon."

"What's a Mexican peon?" asked Jack, curiously.

"Usually a servant, or native of low rank. They worked as laborers on the railroad lines that my father built for the Mexican Government."

"I suppose you've seen lots of them?"

"Oh, yes. You meet with them everywhere in Mexico."

"And this chap you say you saw yonder, looked like one?"

"Yes."

"Then we are likely to find more than one of them on this island. We might even find a village full of them behind this wall. You say he went behind that ledge of rock, yonder?"

"Yes."

"There must be a pass there. Wherever he went, we can go, too."

"Would it be safe to do it?" she asked, nervously.

"As Tom and I are armed with six-shooters, I guess there isn't any danger. It is a good thing we brought the revolvers along, Tom. I told you that one never can tell what may happen in this world."

"That's right; but I'm not looking for trouble, even if I am heeled," said Tom.

"If we find a passage in the rock, aren't you game to follow it and see what it leads to?"

"I'll go anywhere you go, but maybe Miss Raymond would not care to go on an exploring expedition, and it wouldn't be just the right thing for us to go off and leave her behind in the valley."

"Oh, I'm willing to go wherever you boys go."

"There, Tom, you see Miss Kittie has more pluck than you gave her credit for," laughed Jack.

"I see she has. If there is any exploring to be done, we'll all go together."

They hurried forward to the ledge of rock, and when they reached it the boys were disappointed to find no sign of a pass or anything of the kind.

"As the man you saw, Miss Kittie, is not behind this rock, he must have gone somewhere," said Jack. "The question is, where did he go?"

"He couldn't walk into the solid rock, nor vanish into the air," said Tom, "therefore, it stands to reason there must be a hole or passageway somewhere here."

Jack and Miss Kittie agreed with him, so the three looked carefully around for some kind of a break in the rock through which the man must have vanished.

Their perplexity was great when they failed to find any.

"Are you sure that your eyes did not deceive you, Miss Kittie?" asked Jack.

"Oh, I saw him as plain as I ever saw anything in my life," she asserted, positively.

"Then I don't see where he went to."

CHAPTER XII.

HOW JACK AND TOM DISCOVER THE ENTRANCE IN THE WALL OF ROCK.

The three castaways spent some time looking around and talking about the mysterious disappearance of the native,

but they were no wiser on the subject at the end of an hour, than when they first began their investigations.

Finally they gave the puzzling matter up, and continued on their way.

They followed the wall of rock till it joined the rocky barrier that encircled the valley, and that settled their hopes of finding a passage to the other part of the island.

From that point they returned the way they had come, and paused again at the ledge behind which the native had disappeared.

The boys once more looked the rock very carefully over, but without result.

Then the party returned to the haven, carrying a fresh supply of fruit.

The man who vanished, formed the chief subject of their conversation till they began to prepare their midday meal, and then they began talking about something else.

After dinner the two boys went up to the top of the rocks again.

They picked their way along, till they were about midway of the valley.

Then they sat down to rest.

The waters of the Gulf sparkled in the sunshine like a gently ruffled lake, the afternoon breeze being quite light.

There were three sail in sight, but very far away to the north and west.

"I wish I was back at the academy, even with the prospect of a good caning," said Jack. "The more I see of this island the less I like it; and the more I think about our chances of escape, the worse they look. That reef yonder seems to be a fatal obstacle to our hopes. I wonder how many vessels have been wrecked on some part of it, since man first sailed these seas?"

"A good many, I guess," replied Tom.

"I think it's tough to—hello! Look yonder, Tom!" cried Jack, gripping his companion by the arm with one hand and pointing with the other in some excitement.

Tom turned his head and looked.

He saw four dark-skinned men with smooth faces, apparently between twenty and twenty-five years of age, gathering fruit in big bags from a bunch of plantain trees.

Their only attire consisted of a pair of long trousers, of some white material.

The sunshine glistened on their naked backs as if the skin had been oiled and then, like furniture, treated to a coat of French polish.

"The island is inhabited, beyond any doubt," said Tom, as the two boys, from their elevated position, watched the four natives picking the fruit. "It was one of those chaps that Miss Raymond saw this morning. I'll bet there are more of those fellows behind that wall of rock."

"What gets me, is how in thunder do they get through the rock?" replied Jack. "They are solid flesh and blood, like you and I, and could no more pass through that wall unless there was an opening in it, than we could. I'll bet they've got a secret door through which they come and go at will, and it is so nicely constructed that we couldn't discover any signs of it this morning. There must be some reason for such extreme secrecy, and I'm more curious than ever to find out what is on the other side of the wall."

"I'm with you if we can find a way of getting there," answered Tom.

"I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's go down into the valley, creep up to where those fellows are gathering the fruit, and follow them to the wall when they start off with their loads. Maybe we'll be able to get on to the manner in which they get through the wall."

Tom fell in with Jack's suggestion, and the two boys lost no time in putting the plan in operation.

With great caution, they approached the spot where the four natives were gathering the plantains.

They were strong, wiry-looking young men, of a color between copper and light bronze.

Their features were fairly regular, though not particularly handsome.

They had perfect teeth, glittering black eyes, and jet-black hair.

Jack and Tom watched them with great curiosity, and when they finally picked up their bags and threw them over their shoulders, with an ease that showed they possessed great strength, the boys followed them as softly as possible.

The four natives made straight for the big rock behind which Kittie had seen one of the same race, vanish that morning.

Reaching it, the boys saw the foremost chap press one hand against the solid rock.

A section of the rock as large as an ordinary door, swung inward as if on hinges, and through this opening the four silently filed.

As soon as the last one had passed through, the door closed again, leaving the rocky wall as before.

"Well, what do you think of that?" said Jack.

"I think it's blamed odd for them to have a secret entrance through that wall," replied Tom. "What do they require it for, unless they have something of great importance that they wish to keep hidden, at all hazards? People from the outside world, like ourselves, seldom come to this island, and only, I guess, when they can't help it, like we did. Consequently, those chaps practically have the island to themselves. Blamed if I can understand why they need a secret door to the other side of the island."

"There is something queer about it, and I for one, am going to try and find out what it means," said Jack.

"I'm with you, old man."

"Then let's go up to the wall and see if we can discover the location of that secret door."

They immediately walked up to the rocky wall where they had seen the four natives enter through the door, and looked closely at it.

There wasn't the slightest indication of a door.

The only thing that marred the smooth face of the rock, was a rough ridge that ran perpendicularly up and down.

Jack pressed on one side of the ridge without result.

When he exerted the same force on the other side, the rock suddenly gave way and a huge slab of stone swung inward, revealing a dark passage before them.

The moment the boy removed his hand from the slab, it swung back into place again.

Pressing on it once more, it opened as before, and seemed to be so perfectly poised that only a slight pressure was required to keep it in any position with the hand.

"If there is, it won't do us any good," replied Tom.

"What did they do with the girl?" asked Jack, who had been impatiently waiting a chance to ask that question.

"They've put her into the room on the second floor, next to the one from which I made my escape," replied Brown.

"We must let her out," said Jack, resolutely. "How can that be done?"

"I kin show yer. It's easy enough, my popinjay. All ye have to do is to tear away a bit of the thatched roof, give her a hand and h'ist her out."

"Show me the way to reach the roof, and I'll have her out mighty soon."

"I'll give yer a lift on to this here wall. Ye can then step on the roof of the buildin' next door. Yer'll see the hole I made to get out at. Make another like it two yards to yer left as ye face the sun."

Brown gave Jack a boost, and he scrambled up on the wall.

A short leap and he was on the roof of the treasure storehouse.

Measuring two yards with his eye, he began with his sheath-knife to tear out a good-sized hole in the roof.

This was not a difficult job to accomplish.

Soon he was looking down into a small room, and his eyes met Kittie's frightened gaze.

"Hello, Kittie," he said, cheerfully.

"Jack!" she screamed, joyfully. "How did you get out of that tomb?"

"We were let out by our shipmate, Bill Brown, who also escaped to this island from the wreck of the Shooting Star, and who has until a few minutes ago, been a prisoner in this building."

While speaking, Jack kept right on enlarging the hole, and now had it large enough to enable the girl to pass through.

"Give me your hand," said Jack.

Kittie reached up, and the boy caught hold of her arm.

"Grab the rim of this hole with both hands when I pull you up, and hold on."

Kittie followed directions.

Jack then reached down and grabbed her under the armpits.

"Now put your arms around my body."

The girl did so.

Jack raised her up two feet above the hole, took fresh hold, raised himself painfully from his knees to his feet, and thus dragged her clear out.

"There you are, Kittie," he said, as her feet rested on the roof.

"Thank you, Jack," she said, gratefully. "How did you know I was down below?"

"Bill Brown told me."

Jack helped Kittie over to the top of the wall, from which they both sprang down into the enclosure where the sarcophagus stood, and joined Bill Brown and Tom.

"Now, how are we going to get away from this place?" asked Jack. "It isn't healthy for us to remain here."

"We couldn't reach the cavern in broad daylight, without being overtaken," said Tom.

"We might chance a sudden dash, and keep pursuit at bay with our revolvers," replied Jack. "Take a cautious

look out, and see whether the way is clear in the direction of the cavern, Tom."

The young sailor at once left the enclosure for that purpose, and the rest impatiently and anxiously awaited his return.

At that moment Tom reappeared in a state of considerable excitement.

"We'll never be able to leave here," he said. "The natives—men, women and children—are all gathered around the square outside. A procession of the spearmen, led by the five big bugs, are coming this way. Don't you hear them chanting a hymn?"

His companions admitted that they heard the sound. The situation appeared to be critical in the extreme.

CHAPTER XV.

A CATASTROPHE—CONCLUSION.

"What shall we do?" asked Jack, as the four looked at each other.

"There's only one thing we kin do, my hearties," spoke up Bill Brown, "and that is to get into this here treasure storehouse next door. There's only one entrance, and that faces the square, so we're bound to be seen doin' it. But that won't make no difference, if we kin get in and barricade the door. Your revolvers will keep the rascals at bay, and when they see they can't get at us, maybe they'll be willin' to make terms with us."

"It's a kind of desperate expedient," said Jack.

"S'pose it is? It's our only chance," replied the big sailor. "And we hain't got no time to lose over doin' it, for yer kin tell by the sound that the procession is comin' nearer every minute."

A quick decision was necessary, and it was resolved to follow Brown's plan.

Headed by the big sailor, they left the enclosure, crept along the northern wall of the treasure storehouse, and as soon as they reached the corner they made a rush for the doorway, which they entered in a bunch.

They were seen by the astonished natives gathered in the square.

The crowd set up a loud shout, but the people made no attempt to come nearer.

"Here's a big slab of stone that just fits the door," said Brown, as soon as the castaways were inside. "Help me push it in front of the opening."

It took the united strength of the stalwart sailor and the two boys to effect this, but they succeeded in doing it.

They found metallic clamps set into the wall which had been put there to hold the slab in place, and when these were set the stone could not be pushed in from the outside.

As for the four windows, they were too narrow to permit of any one passing through them.

The windows were set too high for the castaways to look through while standing on the floor, so they hauled a lot of golden ingots under each of the front ones, piled them up to a height of three feet, and then Jack mounted one pile and Tom the other, and took an observation of the square.

The procession was just coming into view, a hundred feet away.

"You hold it, and I'll step in and take a look," said Jack.

"All right," replied Tom, placing his back against the door.

Jack stepped into the passage, and the first thing he did was to feel along the inside of the slab.

His fingers encountered a metal ring, intended evidently to pull the door open from the inside.

Satisfied that he knew how the entrance worked, Jack walked forward through the passage.

After he had gone a dozen feet in a winding direction, the passage widened out unexpectedly, and Jack struck a match to see where he was.

He found himself in a small, natural cavern with a dark hole on the opposite side.

Jack crossed this cavern and entered another passage, which he ascertained by flashing another match, was simply a fissure in the solid rock about four feet wide on the average.

Jack followed its winding course for perhaps a hundred yards, when he saw a light ahead.

Coming to the end of the passage, the boy looked into another cavern with a wide entrance, admitting the rays of the afternoon sun.

This cavern was untenanted, but it contained many articles, such as a species of wicker basket, and odd-looking vessels made of a dull red pottery.

Gazing across the cavern and out through the entrance, Jack saw a collection of one-story stone buildings.

A number of natives similar to those he and Tom had seen in the fruit valley, were walking about.

Suddenly two stalwart men entered the cave, and Jack shrank back just in time to escape observation.

They were attired in a close-fitting tunic of some kind of cloth, and a short skirt like a Highlander's kilt, reaching nearly to the knees.

They wore shoes similar to an Indian's moccasin, and a large headdress consisting of what appeared to be a band of burnished gold to which were attached perpendicular metallic feathers that reflected the sunshine.

Huge gold-like bands encircled their arms midway between elbow and shoulder, and a large glittering ornament of thin yellow overlapped circular metal plates was attached to the center of their tunics.

They were magnificent looking men from a physical standpoint, and their color was a light copper.

Each carried a spear, the head of which was made out of flint.

After watching them for awhile, Jack retraced his steps through the two passages and rejoined his companion who was faithfully standing with his back against the slab of stone to keep the entrance open.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE STONE BOX.

"Well, what did you see?" asked Tom, with some eagerness.

"Let go of the door and I'll tell you. We know where the secret entrance is now, and will have no trouble finding it again," replied Jack. "Let's go back to the haven and I'll make one story of it for you and Kittie."

They found the girl reading a novel that came ashore in one of the sea-chests.

"We've got something to tell you, Kittie," said Jack. "What is it?" asked the girl.

"We've discovered the place where that man you saw this morning, entered the wall of rock."

"Indeed," she replied, with a look of interest.

Jack then explained how he and Tom, after they had gone upon the rocks, had seen the four natives gathering fruit in the valley.

He told her how they had shadowed the natives to the ledge of rock behind which she had seen the man vanish that morning, and saw the leader of the party push a kind of door in the solid rock open, when the four passed through, the door closing after them.

"It didn't take us long to find that door after that," continued Jack, "though it is cleverly constructed. I pushed it open and found a dark passage beyond it."

Then he went on to state how he had entered the passage alone, followed it and what he had seen when he reached the big cave open to the air at the other side of the rocky wall.

Both Tom and Kittie listened with eager interest to his brief story, and asked him a number of questions.

Then Tom declared that he and Jack must investigate the other side of the island next morning, and see what kind of strange people inhabited it.

Kittie then said that they must take her with them.

"If there is any danger, I want to face it with you," she said. "Think how I should feel if you went on this adventure and never came back!"

It was evident from the way she looked at Jack, that she was chiefly concerned about him, and preferred to face peril in his company to remaining behind and worrying about what might happen to him.

The sun was now setting, so while the girl started to build a fire, the boys went off to gather a supply of shell-fish.

After supper they talked about what the next day's adventure was likely to lead to, and by the time the full moon rose, they turned in.

They were up bright and early on the following morning, but it was after eight before they were ready to start for the secret door.

It didn't take them long to reach it.

Jack pushed it open, and the three castaways entered the dark passage, Kittie with some misgivings as to what was before them.

Jack led the way with his hand on his revolver, and they passed in single file through the first cavern, and on through the second passage, till they reached the open cave, where they paused to look around before discovering their presence to the strange inhabitants of this part of the island.

The open cave was vacant, and finally Jack said:

"Are you ready to go on?"

"Sure," replied Tom.

Accordingly, they crossed the cave and issued into the open air.

They now found themselves at the head of a second valley, a part of which was covered with one-story stone houses, and a part under cultivation in farm style.

The houses nearest the cave were small and very ordinary.

Then came a kind of small, square or open space, and from that on, the houses were much larger and of more careful architecture, though none were over one story in height, except a single building on one side of the square, facing the rising sun.

This building was apparently of two stories, for it towered above all the rest.

It was square and looked like a large block-house with its small narrow windows.

A big doorway afforded entrance.

None of the houses had doors or window-sashes attached to the openings admitting light and air.

All the roofs seemed to be made of thatch, slightly peaked so that the rain would run off.

A number of the dark-skinned natives were busy at work in the fields, and several women were moving from the fields to the houses with small wicker baskets on their heads.

Copper-colored men in kilts and head-dresses, and spears in their hands, could be seen here and there, apparently directing operations.

The three young castaways advanced some way into this scene of life and activity, before their presence was noticed.

One of the women coming to the door of a house was the first to discover them, and she regarded them with fear and amazement.

Then she uttered a peculiar cry.

Other women came rushing to the doors of their houses, more cries went up, and soon the entire valley was in a state of tumult and alarm.

Jack, Tom and Kittie kept on, undismayed by this exhibition of excitement their presence occasioned.

By the time they reached the square, people flocking from all directions almost surrounded them, but kept at a respectable distance, gazing at them as if they were inhabitants of another world, and not to be approached with impunity.

The three castaways were now close enough to the two-story building to observe the extraordinary points of its construction.

The doorway and windows were faced inside and out with a burnished yellow metal that looked like gold.

The thick stone coping at the top was ornamented with a succession of characters all similar, and like inverted capital L's, of the Gothic type, and made of the same yellow metal.

Strange hieroglyphic designs also of yellow metal, covered the front wall in profusion, and scintillated in the rays of the morning sunshine.

Altogether, the building was a most remarkable specimen of ancient architecture, and the three young people took particular notice of it.

"Gee! That building looks as if it was ornamented with gold," said Jack; "but, of course, that can't be. That's too ridiculous a supposition. Gold is altogether too valuable to be wasted in that manner. Why, if that was pure gold it would represent enough money to more than pay the annual interest on the public debt of the United States."

"Let's go in and see what it looks like inside," sug-

gested Tom. "That will give us a chance to get away from the mob that is following us and looking at us as if we were natural curiosities."

They turned and walked toward the building.

The thirty-odd native men and women who had been silent up to that moment, now began to utter strange, uncouth cries, and display signs of uneasiness.

At that moment a dozen of the copper-skinned, higher-grade inhabitants came upon the scene, and lining up before the entrance to the building, presented their spears in a hostile way.

"That settles it; we can't go in there," said Jack, as the three castaways came to a halt within a few feet of the menacing spear line." "Let's go somewhere else."

Accordingly, they turned away and continued their walk.

They hadn't gone far before the natives broke away from around them and gathered together in a bunch in their rear.

Then the young people saw a party of the copper-skinned people, some with spears and some without any kind of arms, approaching.

Those without weapons seemed to be the head men of the village, as the boys called the place, for they were more splendidly attired than the spearmen, and carried themselves with greater dignity.

They halted, with the spearmen on either side, and awaited the three young people to draw near.

Recognizing their seeming importance, the young castaways made them a polite bow on coming to a halt before them.

There were five men who carried no weapons, and one of the five in the center of the bunch, appeared to be the chief personage of the place.

He was fairly covered with golden ornaments, and his tunic and kilt were of special richness.

Jack and his two companions waited for him to make the first advances.

This he did by motioning one of his associates to advance.

Then he said something to this man in a strange tongue.

The man, taking Jack as the leader of his party, addressed him in Spanish.

Jack didn't know a word of that language, and therefore did not understand what he said.

Kittie, however, was well up in Spanish, and she said: "He wants to know where we came from."

"Well, if you understand him, you'd better do the talking," replied Jack.

So the girl told the man that they had been shipwrecked on the island.

He translated her answer to the head man.

Probably a dozen questions were put to Kittie, many of which she translated to Jack, and he suggested the reply.

Finally the conference came to an end, and after a consultation between the five men, the head one said something to the spearmen, who immediately advanced and ranged themselves on either side and behind the three castaways.

Four of the head men walked away, leaving the interpreter behind.

He ordered the spearmen to march the three young

people to a one-story, roofless building in the rear of the big, ornamented one.

The building really consisted of simply four walls, pierced by the single doorway.

There was nothing in this enclosure but a big stone box, covered with a great slab, ornamented with a hideous figure of a man with horns like a bull's, growing out of his head.

The interpreter motioned to the two boys to stand in the center of the space.

Kittie was about to join them, when the interpreter in Spanish, ordered her to remain where she was.

As the boys stood facing the interpreter, two natives entered with ropes, and grasping the boys as if they were mere children threw them on the ground and bound their arms to their bodies.

The natives then went to the stone box, lifted the cover, and stood it against the wall.

Then the interpreter raised his hand.

In answer to the signal, the spearmen began to chant a weird dirge.

In the midst of it, the interpreter made another sign, waving his hand at the box.

As the two natives lifted Jack into the stone sarcophagus that was to be his grave, Kittie Raymond uttered a scream and attempted to rush over to him, but was prevented by the crossed spears of the Aztec-looking warriors.

After the natives had deposited Jack in the bottom of the box, they picked Tom up and laid him beside his chum.

Before either of the boys could grasp the meaning of the situation, the cover was placed above them, shutting out the light of day and every sound of life.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH BILL BROWN TURNS UP IN THE NICK OF TIME.

"Say, what are we up against?" asked Jack, of his companion in misfortune.

"Blessed if I know. I don't like the looks of this, for a cent," replied Tom.

"Neither do I. We are evidently prisoners."

"And this is a queer kind of cell they've put us in."

"I wonder how long they mean to keep us here?"

"Not long, I hope, for this box seems air-tight. I don't believe we'd last more than half an hour in here. There isn't air enough."

"Maybe they put us here to kill us in an easy way," said Jack, anxiously.

"An easy way! Great jibbooms! It would be a horrible death for us," answered Tom, beginning to shiver at the bare thought of such a thing.

"It looks as if we made a mistake coming into this part of the island."

"I'm afraid we did. This is what we catch for being curious."

"I wonder what they mean to do with Kittie?" said Jack.

"I couldn't tell you. All I'm sorry for now is, that we weren't quick enough to use our revolvers on those rascals."

"We may have a chance to do that yet, for they didn't take them away from us."

"I wouldn't give much for the chance if they don't release us from this tomb pretty soon."

"Don't call it a tomb, Tom. You give me the cold shivers."

"It looks like one, and may be intended for one. You can't tell what diabolical trick those rascals may not be capable of. It's all right to hope for the best, but I can't see anything but the worst before you and me. I'm afraid our name is mud."

"Great Scott! I can't die this way," cried Jack, desperately.

"If this is our fate, I don't see how we can get away from it."

Jack remained silent, and for a few moments neither spoke.

"Do you really believe that——" began Jack, when he was interrupted by a noise overhead.

The cover of the sarcophagus was moving.

"They're going to let us out," cried Jack, joyfully.

A streak of light appeared at one end of the top of the box.

This widened as the stone was moved further and further off the tomb.

The boys could not see who was moving it, but the person evidently found it quite an effort to master the job.

Finally a big, bronzed and hairy hand got a good grip on the under part of the lid, then it rose up slowly, tilted over and slid to the ground behind the box.

A bronzed and rather wicked-looking face gazed down at the boys, and then a well-known voice they thought stilled forever in the depths of the ocean, said:

"Well, my hearties, how d'ye feel?"

With a gasp of astonishment, the two castaways recognized the speaker as Bill Brown.

"Hello, Bill, are you really alive?" asked Tom.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" grinned the big sailor. "I suppose you chaps would like me to cut you loose?"

"I should say so. You can't do it any too quick to please us," replied Tom.

Brown yanked out his sheath-knife, leaned over and cut the thongs that bound the arms of the boys.

"There yer are, my hearties. Now yer kin get out of yer own accord."

They lost no time in doing so.

"Where are those copper rascals who put us in here?" asked Tom.

"Gone about their business."

"How did you know we were in that box?"

"Seen 'em put yer there."

"Where were you at the time?"

"Lookin' out of a hole in the roof of the next buildin', where I've been kept a prisoner ever since I came ashore on this here island."

"How came you to be taken a prisoner?"

"Several of them half-naked chaps nabbed me under a tree at sunrise, and fetched me through a kind of tunnel into this place. I was brought before five fellers in fine clothes and golden ornaments and put through a course of sprouts in Spanish. Then I was put in a room in the buildin' next door, which is a treasure store-house, for it's full of gold ingots, food and one thing or another. There's enough gold there to make each of us a millionaire."

They came to a stop and the chanting ceased, when several natives stepped forward and explained what they had seen.

The slab before the entrance to the treasure storehouse, confirmed their story.

A consultation of the five was held, and then the interpreter advanced to the building alone.

He stopped near the door, and hailed the castaways in Spanish.

Bill Brown, who could talk the lingo like a native, took Tom's place at the window and held a pow-wow with the man outside.

The interpreter demanded that they surrender.

Brown refused to consider such a thing, telling the interpreter to go to thunder.

The man returned to his associates and reported.

Another consultation took place, the result of which was that the natives were dismissed from the square which was taken possession of by the spearmen.

Four of the head men retired, leaving the interpreter in charge.

It was clear now that the castaways were placed in a state of siege.

There wasn't any doubt that the enemy could hold out indefinitely.

The question was, how long could the besieged hold the fort?

The treasure storehouse could withstand any kind of an assault with impunity from those outside, except an attack by way of the roof.

That was the vulnerable point, though the enemy did not make any attempt to take advantage of it.

"They may take it into their heads at any moment to attack us that way," said Jack. "Once they got into the floor above, they'd have us, unless we can barricade the hole in the ceiling at the head of the stone stairway. How can we do that?"

It was a problem that seemed beyond them.

"The food is all up there, too," said Brown.

"What kind of food is it?"

"Dried maize, rice and dried fruits, principally."

"We could throw a lot of it down here, then we wouldn't starve for some time."

"But is there any water?" asked Kittie.

The big sailor uttered a fierce imprecation, while the boys looked at each other in consternation.

Food there appeared to be plenty, according to Brown, who had seen it, but water—that was something they had not thought of—apparently, there wasn't a drop in the building.

Their fate now seemed sealed, for without water they could not hold out.

What were they to do?

"Let's investigate our resources, anyway," said Jack.

He and Tom rushed to the floor above.

With the exception of the two small rooms in which Brown and Kittie had been confined, the floor consisted of one large room.

This was filled with bins of maize, rice, dried fruit, and other foodstuff.

Along one wall was ranged a score of large, red pots, their narrow mouths covered with thick cloth tied tight.

"What's in them?" asked Tom.

Jack's answer was to pull out his sheath-knife and cut away the cloth from one of them.

The vessel contained some kind of pleasant-smelling, light-colored liquor.

Jack cautiously tasted it.

"It's grape juice," he said, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, "then we have something to drink, after all."

They reported their discovery to Kittie and the sailor.

With Brown's help, all the jars were removed below, and then as much of the food as they figured they would need.

During this work, Kittie stood on one of the ingot piles and watched the movements of the enemy.

By this time it was well along in the afternoon, and all hands were hungry.

They made a meal of dried fruit, which they washed down with grape juice.

The rest of the afternoon they spent in making a barricade of golden ingots at the foot of the stairway, where they could command the opening above with their revolvers, in case the enemy entered by way of the roof.

The boys had plenty of ammunition, and as the inhabitants of the village were not numerous, probably not over one hundred all told—men, women and children—they hoped to be able to stand them off successfully.

About four o'clock the work was completed, and Brown and the boys sat down to rest.

Suddenly, without the least warning, a tremor shook the building, as if a big explosion had taken place some miles away.

"What's that?" cried Jack.

Before either of his companions could answer, the ground and building began to move to and fro, from east to west.

Cries of terror resounded without, in the valley.

The air grew hazy and dark.

"Great Scott! It's an earthquake!" cried Jack, springing on his feet.

The movement of the ground stopped with a sudden shock.

The four castaways were greatly startled, for the peculiar sensation caused by the solid earth moving under one, can only be understood by one who has felt it.

The air outside continued to grow darker, and the stillness was broken only by the excitement that reigned among the inhabitants of the valley outside.

For thirty minutes nothing more happened, and the besieged thought that the earthquake was over, when a loud explosion sounded 'way down in the bowels of the island somewhere, and the ground began to sway worse than ever.

A tremendous uproar arose all around.

Shrieks and cries resounded outside.

Rocks began falling with tremendous crashes.

The building moved back and forth like a reed swayed by the wind.

The upper walls fell both inward and outward, and a cloud of dust came floating down the hole.

A tremendous roar, more terrible than anything Brown or the young people ever dreamed of, now filled the air, which grew black and sultry.

With a cry of terror, the big sailor sprang to his feet,

his eyes bulging with fright, and made a rush for the slab that covered the doorway.

He seized it to push it aside, when the earth came to a rest with a heavy shock.

Instantly the stone stairs and front ceiling fell into the room with a crash, burying Bill Brown under several tons of stone, crushing his life out in a moment.

The silence that succeeded was even more terrifying than what the castaways had passed through.

Kittie clung convulsively to Jack, as if he was her only hope.

The three scarcely moved or uttered a sound for half an hour, by which time the air began gradually to grow lighter.

"Is it over?" whispered Kittie, fifteen minutes later. "What an awful experience!"

"I hope so," replied Jack, releasing her.

In a few minutes the setting sun flashed out and lit up the ruins of the treasure storehouse.

The sunshine put fresh courage into the hearts of the three.

"Poor Brown; he's gone," said Tom. "Let's take a look at the damage outside."

He and Jack made their way over the debris to where a gaping hole had been torn out of the front wall, and gazed out on the landscape.

They gave a gasp of amazement.

Practically the whole island, reefs and all, had vanished in the water of the Gulf, only about an acre remaining, in the midst of which stood the storehouse with its treasure of golden ingots, a portion of which was buried under huge stones.

Every house and every inhabitant had disappeared, too.

A cloud of steam hung over the site of the island, but it was fast melting under the heat of the sun.

Kittie was called to view the awful transformation which had taken place.

The three gazed spell-bound on nature's wreck, for a long time.

"What's that yonder?" asked Jack, pointing to something white floating into view from behind a jagged rock at the water's edge.

"It's a boat," cried Tom. "A small schooner-yacht."

"We shall be rescued," said Jack, joyfully, as they looked at it.

"There doesn't seem to be anybody aboard of it," said Tom.

As the boat came nearer over the still water, it was seen that no one was at the tiller, or anywhere in sight on board.

The boys ran down to the water's edge, Tom springing in and swimming off to her.

He entered the cabin and when he came out, shouted to Jack that there was not a soul aboard.

There was no wind, but the trend of the tide finally brought her close enough in, for Tom to cast her bow-line to Jack, and they soon had her moored in safety.

The boat looked like a pleasure craft, and was provided with every necessity and luxury, particularly in the provision and liquor line.

The castaways immediately took up their quarters aboard

of her, and for the first time in many days enjoyed a first-class meal cooked by Kittie.

During dinner they speculated as to what had become of the late occupants of the handsome little craft, but they could only surmise that all hands had perished, somehow during the earthquake.

"Well, she came in time to let us out of a bad hobble," said Jack. "We'll load her with as much of the gold as we can gather in the building and then sail for New Orleans. I reckon this is where the three of us acquire money to burn. If we don't get a million out of that treasure-house I'll be disappointed."

There were four elegant staterooms in the craft, and that night each of the castaways occupied one, and slept like a top.

After breakfast all hands, Kittie included, began transferring golden ingots to the hold of the vessel.

Tom threw overboard the iron ballast, to make plenty of room for the precious metal, of which they secured enough during the morning to make their hearts glad.

After dinner they returned to the work, and soon had the craft well loaded, though there was room for a lot more.

While the three stood on deck, looking into the hold, and figuring on how much more they ought to take, for they hated to leave any gold behind, they heard a crash.

Looking around in a startled way, they discovered that the rock on which the ruins of the storehouse stood, had sunk out of sight, carrying the rest of the gold with it.

That settled the question, they were arguing.

Nothing remained but to set sail for home, which they did.

Two days later they reached the mouth of the delta, and another day was spent in getting up to New Orleans.

They immediately transferred the golden ingots to the government assay office, and the stuff was valued at \$1,200,000.

Each of the castaways therefore received \$400,000.

Jack didn't go back to school, but with Tom, escorted Kittie to her aunt's home in Charleston, where the boys decided to stay and go into business together.

To-day the firm of Carter & Lanston is a very important one in Charleston.

Each of the partners lives in a swell home, Jack's being looked after by Kittie Raymond, who became his wife soon after he reached twenty-one, and thus the three young castaways of the Mystic Isle are bound together by ties that will last as long as they live.

THE END.

Read "EASTMAN & CO., STOCKS AND BONDS; OR, THE TWIN BOY BROKERS OF WALL STREET," which will be the next number (172) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

Taxicabs in London, as in New York, are a marked success, and the hansom is being crowded out. Although scarcely a year has passed since these swift-moving carriages appeared, the capital already invested in London taxicabs is \$10,000,000. There are 758 taxicabs on the street, 2,600 taxicabs ready for engagements, and 1,700 licensed drivers.

Are billiards dying out, and are motoring and golf killing them? In 1894 the French Treasury returns noted 95,000 billiard tables in the country. This year the figure is only 89,000. The treasury laments the fact, not from any disinterested love for the grand old game, but because every billiard table pays a heavy tax. Motoring of course contributes its full share to the inland revenue here as well as elsewhere, but so far the royal and ancient pastime, which is quite new here, pays nothing to the state. However, that may come in due course, and golf clubs, balls, caddies and links may be taxed to make up for the shrinkage in billiard tables.

The most venerable rose tree in existence is said to bloom against the ancient church of Hildesheim, in Germany. Hildesheim has had a most eventful history. Notwithstanding the many parties which at different times have been in the ascendency, they all seem to have respected and tended the rose tree, which, it is said, was planted by Charlemagne. The trunk is now almost as big as a man's body. There are five principal limbs trained against the church, the tree being protected by iron railings inclosing an area of about twenty-six square feet. The rude German soldiers in early ages tended the tree, Catholics and Protestants, in turn masters of the town, drained the ground, the soldiers of Turenne fastened up the branches with clamps, and those of Napoleon a century and a half later erected the railings.

Germany and the Netherlands have been conducting together a series of experiments for the purpose of ascertaining how far certain colors and powers of light can be seen. A light of one-candle power is plainly visible at one mile and one of three-candle power at three miles. A ten-candle power light was seen with a binocular at four miles, one of twenty-nine at five miles, though faintly, and one of thirty-three-candle power at the same distance without difficulty. On an exceptionally clear night a white light of three and two-tenths-candle power could be distinguished at three miles, one of five and six-tenths at four and one of seventeen and two-tenths at five miles. The experiments were made with green light, as it has been conclusively proved that if a light of that color fills the required

test a red light of the same intensity will more than do so. It was found that the candle power of green light, which remained visible at one, two, three and four miles, was two, fifteen, fifty-one and one hundred and six, respectively.

A neat little bungalow located in the outskirts of Long Beach, built by a pretty little woman, is attracting attention. The builder is Mrs. Frank Nottingham, who is a prominent worker in the Y. W. C. A. Miss Gertrude Gilbert, matron for the Y. W. C. A., wanted a home, owned a lot and had about \$120 with which to erect a house. She knew this would be impossible if she were compelled to hire carpenters at \$3 a day. Mrs. Nottingham talked the matter over with her and finally said she would undertake to build it and would not charge her a penny for her labor. Though she had never built so much as a chicken house before, the plucky woman was confident. Armed with a rusty saw, hatchet, plane and level, she started to work. She devoted exactly 100 hours to the undertaking, and a short time ago turned the house over to its owner. The bungalow is 18 by 20 feet in dimensions and contains seven windows and two doors. Mrs. Nottingham had no assistance, placing the big heavy rafters alone and performing feats a carpenter would shun.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Dumley—Say, you'd better take something for that cold, old man. Now— Wise—Don't offer me any more, please. I've taken too much already. Dumley—Too much what? Wise—Advice.

"Do you take any periodicals?" asked the new clergyman on his first round of parish visits. "Well, I don't," replied the woman; "but my husband takes 'em frequent. I do wish you'd try to get him to sign the pledge."

"I saw G. Whizz in his automobile yesterday, and it was actually creeping along at a snail's pace." "Good gracious! Why, Whizz is one of the most notorious speed maniacs in town. What do you suppose was the matter?" "He was going to see a dentist."

The young man who received the following note from his fiancee would have been better pleased if she had employed a comma or two. "Jack Huggard called yesterday. Jack couldn't have heard of our engagement, for before leaving he proposed. I told him I was sorry I was engaged to you."

"These pianos look too cheap," said the young woman with the picture hat, her eyebrows contracting slightly. "Show me some of the best you've got." "Yes, ma'am," said the salesman. "May I ask you how high you'd like to go?" "Me? Oh, I only go to G, but I want one with all the octaves, just the same."

Mr. Browne—I regret to say, dear, that—er—concerning that birthday gift I promised you—er—diamonds are up in price now, higher than I can afford. Mrs. Browne—I'm so sorry, dear. Mr. Browne—Yes, it is disappointing— Mrs. Browne—Yes, it's too bad that you'll have to pay more than you can afford.

The Bishop of London, at a dinner in Washington, told a story as the cigars came on about one of his predecessors. "When Dr. Creighton was Bishop of London," he said, "he rode in a train one day with a small, meek curate. Dr. Creighton, an ardent lover of tobacco, soon took out his cigar case, and with a smile he said: 'You don't mind my smoking, I suppose?' The meek, pale little curate bowed and answered humbly: 'Not if your lordship doesn't mind my being sick.'"

WAS HE MAD?

By John Sherman.

"The vagaries of a diseased mind are oftentimes wonderful. I am more and more impressed with the belief that insanity is a disease which grows on people. From a small incident, or from a period of shock, insanity takes its start. Thus it was with Hugh Somers. Had he been surrounded with pleasant influences, had his mind been drawn off that horrible affair, he would have remained of sound mind, and his life would not have been placed in jeopardy. Was he mad? was the question in the trial."

I read this indorsement on the back of one of my uncle's manuscripts, and, lighting a fresh cigar, drew the argand light nearer to my elbow, placed my feet on my desk at nearly a level with my head, opened the manuscript, and soon everything else was forgotten in the interest I felt in the solution of the query—"Was He Mad?"

Captain Somers was descended from a proud and wealthy old family, and lived in elegant style at his country seat, known for miles around as Breeze Lawn. The captain's wife had been dead many years, and the family consisted of the captain and Hugh and the servants. There was another son, John Somers, older than Hugh, who had brought disgrace on the good old family name, and had been disinherited by his father.

Captain Somers had driven him sternly forth, cursing the hour of his birth. Once Captain Somers made up his mind there was no such thing as relenting. Yet, stern though he was, he had a heart tender as a woman's where Hugh was concerned, for on him he lavished his whole affection, which was returned by Hugh with interest.

At Breeze Lawn everything moved along smoothly, happily, without jar or turmoil, until one night a servant, returning from the near-by village about nine o'clock, stumbled over the body of a man stretched across the path.

His cries of alarm drew others from the house. A light was procured, and their horror may be imagined when they made the discovery that it was the body of their master, cold in death, and besmeared with blood which had flowed from the fatal cut of the assassin.

For a few hours the sight of Hugh's grief was fearful to look upon, and then he became calm and silent to a degree which was melancholy.

Who had done the awful deed?

This was the question which passed from mouth to mouth; a question which to this day has never been actually solved, although after circumstances enabled those who knew to make a shrewd guess.

The murder was the usual nine days' wonder, and then it began to be gradually forgotten.

Captain Somers was buried, and life at Breeze Lawn settled back into its old channel, save that one of their number was missing, and the other singularly silent and reserved.

Hugh became more and more reserved as months rolled away, until finally he never spoke at all, save when irritated by one of the servants, whom he would discharge on the spot, and who would not be replaced.

At last but one servant was left to inhabit the grand old house, and enjoy its old-fashioned chairs and antique fixtures. She at length was also found fault with and discharged, and Hugh was left alone.

How he passed his time no one ever knew, for none ventured near the house and its churlish master.

And then a strange story began to float around. It was to the effect that the house was haunted.

Some treated the story with scorn, but were convinced when at night they saw a figure in white glide about the grounds or saw it appear and disappear at one of the windows.

This continued for several months, and then one day the village people were startled by the news that on the night before May Turner had disappeared from her father's house.

Had any one seen her? This was the anxious query of the distressed father, of every one he met.

At last an old farmer who knew May stated that he had seen her in the neighborhood of Breeze Lawn, about ten o'clock the night before. It had been moonlight, and he was sure it was she. In fact, he had spoken to her, but she had hurried on as if desirous of not being known.

Seen near Breeze Lawn! Everybody knew that May and Hugh were lovers before that fatal day when the captain had been killed. Since that time, however, he had not been near her.

To Breeze Lawn the anguished father hurried with some neighbors.

The hall door was open and they entered the house. Turning into one of the parlors, it was to be riven with anguish at the sight of his daughter stretched on the floor, dead.

The story of the ghost was explained. The devoted girl had come to Breeze Lawn night after night to bring food to the man she loved, to care for him as well as she could. She had come silently, like a shadow, and had gone in the same way, and Hugh never once had seen her until the night before.

They found him in another part of the house, and his clothing was speckled and daubed with May's life-blood. They took him in beside her body, but he evinced no emotion, no horror, at the sight.

"Who is she?" he asked.

But they thought him shamming.

Insanity was an old dodge, it could not work with them.

Hugh was arrested and taken to jail, and placed on trial for murder.

It was then that I came upon the scene, being summoned as an expert in insanity, to state my belief as to Hugh's mental condition.

Others differed from me. I said he was mad, others that he was sane. That he had struck down May Turner none doubted, but the trial resolved itself into—not whether he committed the murder, but—was he mad?

Mad he was finally decided to be, through my exertions, and therefore not accountable for his actions. It was settled that he was to be taken to an insane asylum; in short, to the one I had charge of.

During the trial he had not said a word—aye, yes, or no; although I had observed that he watched me closely. It was after the trial was finished that he surprised me by voluntarily opening a conversation with me.

"You think I am mad?" he said.

"A little unsettled in mind by your troubles," I answered.

"Wrong!" he exclaimed. "But I dare not speak for his sake."

"For whose sake?" I inquired, opening my eyes. Was somebody back of this? Somebody whom Hugh's supposed insanity was protecting?

But he was as dumb as an oyster when I asked whom he meant.

He did not speak to me again for several hours, and then his eyes suddenly flashed as he blurted out:

"He must be punished!"

"He! Who?"

Again no reply.

An hour later he as suddenly and unexpectedly spoke again.

"There was a will!"

"Left by your father, you mean?"

"Yes."

"What of it?"

"It has not been found."

"Well?"

"It must be!"

"Why?"

"Never mind," and he shook his head knowingly, a cunning expression in his eyes, such as is never seen in those of a sane man.

I was more deeply interested than ever in this strange case.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"No. Why?" I asked.

"Because all the others seem to be," he answered. "They say you are going to take me away."

"Yes."

"Do you mind spending one night with me in Breeze Lawn?"

"No; do you wish it?"

"Yes."

I pondered deeply before I replied. I was responsible now for his safe keeping. Was there too much risk in acceding to his desire? Curiosity finally decided me, and I made him happy by telling him that we would spend the night at his place.

It was considerably after dark when we got there. The night air was raw and chilly, and I put on my light overcoat and kept it on even indoors, for the house was damp from being so long shut up.

I inquired where there was a lamp, and was startled by his peculiar laugh.

"I've smashed them all," he said; "no lamps for me; no—no, I want it all dark when he comes. A light might frighten him away."

I, however, would not think of spending the night with him in utter darkness, for, though not afraid of him, I knew not what vagary might cross his mind.

At last I struck something which would answer nearly as well as a lamp; it was a torch of pitch pine.

Hugh made no resistance when I lighted it, and I did not offer to stop him when he went about carefully screening the windows and stopping up the cracks of the doors, so that the rays of light should not be seen beyond the room.

Then I sat down in an old-fashioned but comfortable arm-chair and placed my hat on the table beside me. Hugh kept restlessly moving about, now examining his father's desk, and now some other articles of furniture, searching, I supposed, for the missing will.

It was near the hour of midnight when I observed him suddenly pause, and then, pricking his ears, bend his head to listen.

"He's coming!" exclaimed Hugh in an intense whisper.

Presently I could make out the sound of light footfalls. They drew nearer, their destination appearing to be the very room we were in.

Hugh glanced at me, then about the apartment, then darted away and stretched himself on the floor where he would be concealed by a large roll of carpet.

Hardly had quietness settled down when I heard a hand touch the door-knob.

It was slowly turned, and then the door was opened by a tall, thin-faced man, wearing a high hat. He started as if in alarm at sight of the light and myself.

At first he seemed inclined to hastily retire, and then thinking better of it, he advanced within the room.

"Who are you?" he hoarsely asked as he reached the table,

placing his hands on which, he bent forward and looked me keenly in the face.

"Who are you?" I demanded of him.

"I am John Somers, the outcast!" he replied in a bitter tone.

"And your purpose here?"

He shifted his position uneasily, and colored guiltily.

"It is to look for your father's will," I said.

"It is," he admitted. "I have had an awful life," he said pathetically; "I have nearly starved a score of times. If that will is never found, I have an interest here. I have, anyway, if what they say of my brother is true. Is he really mad?"

Before I could answer John Somers received his reply from another, and that other was his brother Hugh.

"No!" thundered Hugh, suddenly arising from his concealment and bounding forward.

Never shall I forget John's look of terror and surprise as he turned and faced his mad brother.

As soon as he could move he recoiled and threw up his arms defensively. With a wild howl Hugh snatched up the flaming torch, and the next instant brought it down on John's head, from which the hat had been jerked by his sudden movement.

The torch struck with a sickening thud, and then all was enveloped in darkness.

I sprang to my feet to interfere, but the darkness prevented, and I could only helplessly stand and listen to the awful conflict then in progress.

"Ha-ha-ha!" I heard the madman shriek. "The day of Heaven's vengeance has come to you, guilty wretch that you are! An eye for an eye—a tooth for a tooth—blow for blow—life for life!"

"I didn't mean to do it," wailed John Somers. "Help—help! Oh, God, would you let him murder me?"

He did not mean to do it? Do what? It struck me like a flash. He had returned, humble, penitent, had begged for forgiveness, for money. Captain Somers had sternly refused, and then had been stricken down by his outcast, desperate son.

I could do nothing, though I was harrowed to the soul by the sounds of the awful struggle going on within so few feet of me.

It did not last long. In less than three minutes the last sound had ceased, and an awful silence had settled down.

I struck a match and saw that both were lying silent on the floor. Having lighted the torch, I found that John Somers had fallen a victim to the fury of the madman, who lay unconscious beside the man he had killed.

When he recovered consciousness I hurried him away from Breeze Lawn. A year's residence at the asylum, during which time he was kept employed in work which interested him, and his mind therefore kept off the terrible past, and I was able to pronounce him cured.

His first sane question was regarding May Turner.

I told him she was dead. He asked no more, and I did not tell him how she had died. He asked to see her grave, and I accompanied him to it. He bent and kissed the mound over her loved form, and then turning to me, he said:

"You may think all the dark past is forgotten. You are wrong! You have tried to conceal from me the knowledge that I have been in an insane asylum, but I know it perfectly well. My mind was diseased: of that I am equally aware. To you are my thanks due for restoring me, the methods of which restoration I now understand. But the fever is still in my blood; I did not kill May! What would you advise me to do?"

"Sell Breeze Lawn and remain away from objects which serve to bring back the past."

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